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From the Margins

Author(s): Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing

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From the Margins

Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing
Anthropology Board of Studies
University of California, Santa Cruz

How can anthropology benefit from cultural studies and cultural studies benefit from anthropology? One area in which these two scholarly trajectories work best together is in theorizing the interface of local and global frames of analysis. The challenge here is to move from situated, that is “local,” controversies to widely circulating or “global” issues of power and knowledge and back, as this allows us to develop understandings of the institutions and dialogues in which both local and global cultural agendas are shaped. This essay is about *margins* as a conceptual site from which to explore the imaginative quality and the specificity of local/global cultural formation. Margins here are not a geographical, descriptive location. Nor do I refer to margins as the sites of deviance from social norms. Instead, I use the term to indicate an analytic placement that makes evident both the constraining, oppressive quality of cultural exclusion and the creative potential of rearticulating, enlivening, and rearranging the very social categories that peripheralize a group’s existence.

Margins, in this use, are sites from which we see the instability of social categories. One way of thinking about this agenda is to imagine a conversation between the approaches of Michel Foucault and Antonio Gramsci. Foucault shows us the discursive construction of social categories and forms of subjectivity. Gramsci reminds us that these categories and their associated kinds of agency have no unquestioned hegemony. Where Gramsci assumes too much about self-evident political interests that produce resistance and social transformation, Foucault, in showing the convention-laden assumptions behind resistance, obscures the suspense that infects possibilities of change. My interest is in the zones of unpredictability at the edges of discursive stability, where contradictory discourses overlap, or where discrepant kinds of meaning-making converge; these are what I call *margins*.

Attention to marginality highlights both the play and constraint of subordinate social positions. In the United States, for example, minorities are marginalized by exclusion from the assumption of being ordinary—and often the jobs, housing, or political opportunities that “ordinary” (white) people expect. At the

same time, minority cultural and political movements are launched from reinterpretations of these same exclusions. Related processes make political struggles over cultural marginalization lively all over the globe.

But the rhetoric of U.S. political struggle—which points us toward the easy intelligibility of power—is not sufficient to understand the complex conversions between exclusion and empowerment that are key to what I call the marginal. Indeed, in working in the Meratus Mountains of South Kalimantan, Indonesia, in the early and mid-1980s, I was struck by the uselessness of what I knew about politics from the United States. At first, South Kalimantan seemed to me a politically quiet place. Where my middle-class U.S. friends denounced the government, even while we generally followed the law, my Meratus Dayak friends always praised the government, although they were perfectly aware of government plans to deforest their territory for multinational loggers and to resettle those who survived in crowded camps. As I gained more familiarity with both national and local politics, however, I began to see that my initial assessment of apathy had been wrong. There was a subtle transformation going on in which local people copied the rhetoric of the state only to exaggerate or misplace it just enough to confuse one's vision. This blurred vision, this uncanny displacement of the rhetoric of state rule, in which one could never quite draw the line between subjection and objection, was key to constituting that local sphere that was worth living in, protecting, and continually reimagining.

My sense is that there is always an uncanny magic involved in imagining the local in the heart of the global, or in imagining the beleaguered community in the heart of the oppressive system, however familiar the social division or the political struggle. It is a magic that allows groups defined by externally imposed categories of cultural difference simultaneously to resent and to embrace those categories. Attention to this complex positioning refuses the moral dichotomies of scholarly debates: Are notions of *culture* and *identity* a Eurocentric imposition of disciplinary logic and status difference? Or do they signal an empowering recognition of the right to speak? Marginality weaves and wanders through these two possibilities, forcing us to acknowledge the partiality of each. Yet the form of the magic through which the local is created as a site of powerlessness or pride cannot be predicted from a global formula. Instead, the problem forces us to attend to political-cultural specificities, such as the military and administrative programs of nation-states, regional political economies, international policy directives, and local-to-global discourses on gender, ethnicity, and religion.

To show the usefulness of creating an analysis through the concept of marginality, I offer a number of analytic strategies in the following pages. These involve the importance of new kinds of attention to out-of-the-way places, to the tension between the constraining versus the empowering aspects of "culture," to the oxymoronic political dilemmas of postcolonial minority status, and to the centrality of gender in marking local/global specificities. Interwoven with these strategies is a commentary on marginality involving my encounter with one multiply-marginal and multiply-inspired woman: Uma Adang, the shamanic

leader of one tiny 1980s religious movement among the Meratus Dayaks. My stories of Uma Adang show the strangeness and indeterminacy of our encounter to both support my arguments and yet deny them, too, the final word.

Hiking down from the forests and scattered swiddens of the Meratus Mountains toward the markets, offices, and mosques of the Banjar plains, I came to pass through the Meratus border settlement of Kalawan. Meratus friends in the mountains had told me of a Kalawan woman, Uma Adang, whom they thought I would enjoy meeting—but when I pressed for details, they had merely nodded knowingly. Alas, when I arrived late one afternoon, no one was home in Uma Adang's neighborhood. Yet it was a convenient place to stop, and I was willing to wait. Leaving my backbasket, I wandered off for a leisurely bath in the river. Imagine my surprise when I looked up from my bath to find a village official, crisply dressed in regulation khaki, bending low before me to shake my hand. Before I could gather all my clothing or half my wits, he had pulled me off, with all the punctiliousness of the White Rabbit, to a very important occasion.

As tea and sugar from the market and deer and durian from the forest appeared around me on the floor of Uma Adang's house, I observed that I was the guest of honor at an impromptu feast. Lines of women and men came through the door, each bending and extending a hand to me in an unfamiliar formal greeting. I had lived in the mountains long enough to know that this was no ordinary Meratus gathering. But what was it? Then Uma Adang herself, lovely and self-possessed, sat down by my side and began speaking to me in grave and unearthly tones—and I was mesmerized.

On Friday, June 21, 1974, at 5:00 in the evening, Uma Adang said, she began to hear voices from the ancient Indonesian kingdom of Majapahit. These voices had told her the true forms of history, ritual, and law, and for the past years she had been teaching and leading her community in these rediscovered traditions. Her voices, she said, had begun to instruct her in all the languages of the world. Then she had dreamed of my coming; she had experienced the high winds, she said, of America, and she had known that I would retrace the steps of the Diamond Queen, who had come once before in ancient time to restore prosperity to this isolated realm. My timely arrival fulfilled one stage of the prophecy of the past.

Seeing that I felt most comfortable with a pen and notebook in my hand, Uma Adang declared herself and her other guests completely open for my questions. Awash with confusion and awe, I hardly knew what to ask. But no matter; Uma Adang and her companions had their own agenda, and they patiently dictated ceremonial forms, destinations for shamanic spiritual travel, mythical eras of history, and classes of valuable, if generally invisible, heirlooms—all lessons faithfully restored from those of the original Diamond Queen—for my slow pen. When the ink finally ran out, Uma Adang was still talking; I grabbed a pencil. It was almost dawn when I risked rudeness to ask for a few hours of sleep.

Once, according to powerful anthropological myths, anthropology was the study of pristine and isolated cultures. Out-of-the-way places had a special status in the field because they were the easiest to craft as pristine. Then, quite recently according to some, things began to change, and the field began to turn toward more cosmopolitan objects. What is to be the fate of out-of-the-way places in this transformation? Should they be banished from the field as a sign of best-forgotten colonial habits? Or might it be possible to disentangle analyses of the rural and the remote from assumptions about the pristine? It is the latter strategy, I argue, that most effectively opposes re-creations of the rural Third World as a nostalgic foil against which dynamic cultural production is imagined—and elite strivings are naturalized and left unmarked as the “global.”

In the last twenty years, anthropologists have paid increasing attention to the global context in which local cultures are formed and transformed. In the 1970s, concern about colonialism and the worldwide spread of capitalism stimulated world systems theories in which scholars studied the articulation of First and Third World political economies. In the 1980s, the writings of Foucault inspired anthropological attention to the spread of “modern” disciplinary regimes and forms of knowledge-making. In the 1990s, cultural studies’ attention to the mass media as a vehicle for spreading and articulating emergent forms of popular culture has encouraged anthropologists to study the globalization of the imagination.¹

These moves have been exciting transformations of anthropology’s once-imagined mission to study unique, isolated cultures. They usefully criticize the field’s classic notions of culture as too static, too bounded, too internally homogeneous, too exoticizing, and too local. They each encourage us to redefine the *local* as a site in which widespread institutions and cultural configurations take on particular forms, rather than as a site of autochthonous cultural formation. Yet attempts to refocus our understandings of culture run up not only against old anthropological notions of the “local” but also against prevalent interdisciplinary notions of the “global.” In particular, our analytic tools for studying global processes lead us back into the very dichotomy that we used them to try to escape: the division between a complex and transcontinentally active core and a static, locally bounded periphery. In the grip of this dichotomy, some places appear to generate the global, while other places seem stuck in the local. Those stuck local places, not surprisingly, turn out to be those that can carry the weight of past dichotomies: they are the rural, the Third World, the tribal, the traditional, the out-of-the-way. With these dichotomies, we can neither fully localize the concerns of European-origin peoples nor appreciate the global impact of the agency of non-Europeans.

Two kinds of tendencies reinforce this core-periphery distinction. First, a number of prominent cultural theorists continue to ignore every place outside of North America and Europe, blithely constructing narratives of cultural process and change with the West as their total universe. The West loses its specificity and internal distinctions in the process in which cultural generalizations about Europeans are discussed as “theory.” This seems true of those who elaborate

evolutionary cultural stage theories, such as those who tell us of the transition from modernity to postmodernity: J. F. Lyotard (1984), Fredric Jameson (1991). The latest high-tech developments in Western thought tend to be, for them, the apex of unilineal cultural development. Second, a good number of scholars who do care about the Third World treat global cultural formation as a homogeneous sphere of circulation. Notions of the global put forward by thinkers such as Baudrillard encourage scholars to follow the transmission of familiar objects, social categories, and logics outward from powerful centers, rather than to analyze the dialogues and struggles that form the situated particulars of cultural production. Meanwhile, explorations of “cultural imperialism” and “globalization” continue to downplay the creative agency of non-European-origin peoples.²

Cultural dynamism, contest, and creativity too often come to be contrasted with an imagined bedrock of out-of-time stability; and this latter is identified with the old object of anthropological study—the peoples and cultures of out-of-the-way places. Pierre Bourdieu’s work is exceptionally explicit about this move. For Bourdieu, Third World people continue to stand for the static, the archaic, the homogeneous, the structurally neat. The imagined *doxa* of rural Algeria is a foil for the complexities and debates of education and class in metropolitan France (Bourdieu 1984, 1990). Indeed, Bourdieu exemplifies the move in which scholars abandon—rather than rethink—the study of rural Third World people because they want to study global cultural formation.

Michael Taussig’s important book *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man* (1987) works against this tide by showing how the wildest people of the Colombian Amazon are constituted as wild within the colonial imagination. His book makes it possible to turn the tools of local/global analysis to out-of-the-way places—rather than abandoning interest in them and thus reconstituting them as before time. Yet even Taussig will only go so far. Arriving at the depths of colonial mimesis, he holds back from his own reformulations in saving a native space—the “charmed circle of men orating through the night around the tobacco pot”—from the possibilities of postcolonial dialogue (1987:135). This is the place, he suggests, that is too remote for dialogue; Western science is so separate from “the natives’ point of view” that there can be no talk, only sorcery. Taussig retreats to his chosen border zone, “upriver near the foothills,” where dialogue can be found. But his dialogue thus continues to ride on the back of that “native,” the sacred and silent space in the jungle.

I admire Taussig’s work and draw from it even in my criticisms. Why does he—like other radical scholars—save out-of-the-way places for a special status with which to contrast the cosmopolitan, the dynamic, the dialogic? Perhaps local/global dialogue and contest are difficult for scholars to imagine if one argues that, like turtles, they go all the way down. Yet it causes people who live in out-of-the-way places tremendous problems to be considered icons of stability and radical difference. One need only think of resettlement projects, civilizing missions, and land expropriations. Besides, it doesn’t make sense.

My argument is that we should not exempt out-of-the-way places from these new forms of cultural analysis; indeed, it is in discussion of such places that we can sometimes best critique and reformulate anthropological frameworks. In part, I am arguing for better descriptions of out-of-the-way places using the tools of the new cultural studies. But I also am arguing that attention to out-of-the-way places will allow cultural analysts to reformulate our theories. To the extent that cultural studies analysis cannot meet the challenges of specific historical configurations, it is not just too general; it is wrong.

The Meratus Dayaks are the kind of group that anthropologists once really liked to study: they farm isolated, shifting plots in rough, densely forested hills; they hunt with dogs and spears, manage fruits and bamboos, and know the rain-forest intimately; they bring their sick to shamans and throw wildly beautiful festivals. They are about as remote as any Indonesian group about whom I have read. Yet the analytical choices involved in describing Meratus as a separate "society" with an autonomous "traditional culture" have seemed to me inappropriate (Tsing 1993b).

A few months after my first visit, when I returned for a longer stay in Kalawan, Uma Adang seemed to have accepted my self-designation as a student of local culture and history. I was a little embarrassed that I had never thought of a more creative counter to her significant looks and whispered questions: "What are you really here for?" But I need not have worried; as a student of culture I was swept into Uma Adang's pageant as creatively as I had been as the Diamond Queen. Because it sounded grand and official, Uma Adang told people to call me Mahasiswa—the locally unfamiliar Indonesian term for "university student," with which I had identified myself. (Siswa is just "pupil," but maha means "great.") She announced that she had known all along that 1980 and 1981 were the Years of the Mahasiswa, just as 1982 would be the Year of the Religious Teacher and 1983 would be the Year of the Revealed Secret. Finally, she cautiously unveiled her knowledge of the great project in which she and I were caught together: presidents and generals from across the world and on high were competing to sit upon the Seven Golden Thrones of the Era of Kings. They had sent out 41 University Students to learn the true History that established the proper seating that could open an era of peace. She and I, she said, were engaged in the same task of searching for this powerful History. Of course I had come.

By this time, my awe and confusion had subsided to a tolerable level, and I was able to appreciate the playful parody that Uma Adang created in even her most bizarre announcements. In a regional politics of state symbolism, Muslim piety, and bureaucratic order, what could be more intriguing than Uma Adang's inspired fake Qur'an readings, pompous "government" speeches full of unintelligible patriotic verbiage, and eerie pronouncements about the political intersections of the past and the future? Consider the sounds—putting aside for a moment the sense—of the following fragment:

*The date the seventh,
The year 1800.*

*Peace be with you.
Including,
To the honorable:
speaking in the History of the World.
Which contains the adat
of the Prophet Lahat
beginning
to be
broadened
by History
that is the most famous,
or the highest,
each day
or each
of us to actualize
Peace and Perfection.*

Anthropologists have worked hard to understand ceremonial forms, shamanic travels, and mythical eras of history such as those about which Uma Adang spoke. Structuralism, functionalism, materialism, ethnoscience, hermeneutics, and much more—all teach us how to make respectful sense of such odd stories as they constitute the domain of the local in which, anthropologists have argued, people make their way as social beings. Yet what would it mean to take seriously Uma Adang's claim that all this ceremony and history formed the agenda of the empire of Majapahit, the model figure in Indonesia of the once and ever-present state? Like other Meratus Dayak leaders, Uma Adang argues that local community has always been a project of the state. Communities are not self-forming social entities, she tells me; they form in fear, compliance, mimicry, refusal, and other forms of dialogue at the edges of much wider discourses and institutions.

The materiality of regional integration and political asymmetry in south-east Kalimantan includes Meratus involvement in a corner of the global forest-products trade—an involvement with at least several centuries of history. It includes a history of sporadically demanding and punitive state administrations ranging from 17th- through 19th-century regional courts, to Dutch colonial administration, to a post-World War II independent nation, which since 1966 has turned toward the pursuit of military order and multinational profit under the banner of "development." Regional integration also includes recent threats from the bulldozers of logging companies and the forced resettlement schemes of the national program for the Guidance of Isolated Populations, as well as the Meratus sense that the precariousness of their survival at the edge of state power is a very old problem indeed, as old as 13th-century Majapahit.³

Meratus have thus not been positioning themselves as "first nations," that is, out-of-time sites of pristine tradition threatened by recent encroachments. Instead, they point to the ways that their imagined difference has been constituted

by powerful outsiders; they point to a heritage of survival as creative living at the edge. Creative living fosters heterogeneity and dispute; there is no consensus here over the terms of community formation but only a cacophony of commentary. The “local” is a form of positioning in the regional, national, and global, and “local” here is contested.

Naming is no exception. The South Kalimantan regional majority imposes on these people an ethnic term—*Bukit* (“hill people”)—with connotations so derogatory that no one will claim the term for his or her own except in a fight. National and regional officials offer the bureaucratic box *suku terasing* (isolated minority). Local people variously use localizing river and hillside names, and fighting generic terms such as *Dayak* or *Kaharingan*,⁴ which in this context means something like “pagan.” They disagree with each other about the appropriateness of “ethnic” forms of labeling. My own ethnographic practices joined the fray as Bingan Sabda, a Meratus scholar, and I invented the geographical-ethnic term *Meratus* for the people of the Meratus Mountains. The verb form of the root word *ratus* (hundreds) seemed an appropriate antiethnic ethnic term to mark cultural heterogeneity and dispersion. Indeed, in this out-of-the-way corner, the imaginative and contested construction of identities and communities is as much a full-time occupation as in any metropolitan center I have visited.

Meratus debates on naming as an index of identity and cultural difference are reminiscent of similar debates in U.S. scholarship on the poetics and politics of culturalist forms of knowledge. Scholars self-identified as diasporic post-colonials, that is, of Third World origin but working in Europe or the United States, have led the way in showing how colonial discourse constructs so-called “other cultures” to separate colonizer and colonized. Edward Said (1978), Gayatri Spivak (1987), and Trinh Minh-ha (1989), for example, have each shown how the notion of *cultural difference* has been used to debase and control colonized people. Such arguments parallel those of a number of the Meratus I knew, and particularly some of the young men with the most conventional political ambitions. These young men pointed to the ways powerful outsiders had named and classified the inhabitants of the mountains to keep them from participating in politics and regional trade; they refused to accept the premise of an intrinsic basis for Meratus identity.

In the United States, scholars addressing the problems of minority communities have had much more to say about empowering aspects of self-involvement with cultural difference. The discourse of domination that seems most constraining is not that of encrusted difference, but that of white privilege falsely universalized to erase the struggles, accomplishments, and dilemmas of people of color. Cornel West (1989), bell hooks (1989), and Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), for example, have argued that breaking out of U.S. cultural homogenizations involves the creativity of making difference matter. Uma Adang’s commitment to revitalizing Meratus Dayak culture—as an ethnic, religious, and political identity—fits reasonably comfortably with this kind of vision.

These are both committed positions that address dilemmas of marginalization; yet each imagines the politics of exclusion differently. The point is to situ-

ate such arguments about the politics of knowledge in relation to the particular political projects they address. Thus, the diasporic critique of colonial categorizing opposes barriers to ex-colonial participation in transnational programs, including academe; the search for U.S. minority cultural identity fights against national invisibility.

In the Meratus Mountains, neither applies simply, and we must expand our sense of both national and transnational dilemmas. The 19th-century Dutch colonial administration set in motion a series of ethnic cultural differentiations that continue to inform national policy toward minorities.⁵ Meanwhile, the nation-state mobilizes such difference in a narrative of centrally coordinated development. In the context of this internal colonialism, one finds the inversion of the U.S. debate: those who, in accepting national citizenship, feel closest to admitting the inevitability of minority status, yet fight to avoid it, while those who recall the possibility of other regimes call up an empowering cultural difference. The latter strategy works to transform the possibilities of national citizenship, which marginalizes minorities, into an imagined imperial subjecthood, like that of Majapahit, in which cultural difference forms no barrier to state loyalty. Uma Adang's version is not so strange as it might initially seem in employing what looks a lot like parody as a technology for this transformation.

Uma Adang was not alone; her neighbors and kin responded with their own inspired parodies. Pa Bundi, Uma Adang's right-hand man, carried an albino monkey as the sacred image of royalty as he solemnly pronounced his devotion for Uma Adang "greater than a diamond like a banana blossom." (Was I to laugh? Even I knew that a reference to the large, ruddy banana blossom usually meant the penis.) Uma Uman—a respected matron in her sixties—carried, fed, and soothed a large plastic baby doll in a disorienting caricature of motherhood. Pa Hati, the Village Head, maintained a sharp government-style appearance as he whispered Uma Adang's secrets of the coming millennium behind his hand. His wife, Uma Hati, also pushing sixty, challenged me to photograph her with her skirts above her waist—and with a big mocking grin on her face. Nor could I be a spectator without a role of my own.

*All of us ask for Peace,
or Perfection,
and surrender to
and I quote: huas ter
al ai se na el ha
number one kun hes ai der hai
ai kun sai
number one.*

Perhaps I was predisposed to approach my work as Mahasiswa with the same tongue-in-cheek seriousness with which Uma Adang led her flock, for in that spirit Uma Adang and I enjoyed each other immensely. In my own script, I luxuriated in the pleasure of a role as ethnographer of so willing an informant. We whispered genealogies together like state secrets in the dark of the night. My

tape recorder offered the rationale for formal speeches on every occasion. Sometimes when we were alone, she had me tape speeches that she could play back, with even more grandeur than the original, when a small audience had assembled. My commentary seeped into her cosmology. Momentarily oblivious to the standards of the presidents and generals that our knowledge unwittingly served, our joint project in culture and history prospered.

As Mahasiswa, I could not ignore the theatrical agendas of my own documentary conventions. I was forced to smile at the strange rituals of even my simplest empirical exercises; how different were they from Uma Adang's "crazy" historical methods? Uma Adang spoke to me about this again and again. Once she met me on a trail, counting my paces to make a local map. Our conversation went something like this:

Uma Adang: Counting paces is a true part of the search for History, but you and I have different methods. You count each step, while I immediately know how many paces I have come when I arrive at a place. For example, I know that I am 222 paces from the last house in the settlement.

AT: Actually, I've counted 947 paces from that house.

Uma Adang: (With a satisfied smile) So you see, I have bigger strides. It was irrefutable logic that could only remind me of the distinctive exoticism of my own training.

Doing anthropology in Indonesia, it is difficult to avoid thinking about the political projects in which even the most neutral-sounding of our analytic tools are invested. Both structuralist and interpretive anthropology emerged, in some senses, from Indonesian encounters, and each can remind us of a different moment in the politics of cultural knowledge. Dutch scholars and officials of the late 19th and early 20th century used structuralist approaches to move from the difference that they imagined dividing the European and the native, to visualize an endless proliferation of difference among the natives themselves. Respectful as this attention to difference has often been, it is difficult not to connect it with the politics of colonial rule.⁶ Thus, Indonesian nationalists turned away from the proliferation of difference to focus on the forging of national unity; instead of the specificity and difference of local laws and customs, they invoked the spirit of Indonesian communities as a vague but inclusive ground for national action.⁷ Clifford Geertz's interest in thick description and local knowledge (1973, 1983) looks a lot like an endorsement of this nationalist project.⁸ Like the Indonesian nationalists, Geertz explains culture as a system of publicly available but diffusely situated meanings that form no intrinsic barriers to well-meaning participation and instead inform the possibilities of socially responsible action. Such commitments to meaning make it possible to describe a cultural entity—and give it grounds for agency—without a focus on the lines of difference and deference that form its external and internal exclusions.

It is perhaps because of the connections such approaches forge between local commitments and group-oriented agency that the linked projects of nationalism and cultural interpretation have seemed so promising to advocates of out-

of-the-way peoples without the benefits of national representation. The notion of *cultural survival* brings together imagery of national sovereignty and of local knowledge.⁹ As this way of conceptualizing indigenous rights gains global legitimacy, it may come to have an appeal in South Kalimantan. In the 1980s, however, Meratus risked their survival on other strategic moves. No one imagined that it was possible to construct communities that lay entirely outside the purview of the state and the regional majority. Instead, it seemed necessary to address the paradox of marginality that placed them both inside and outside the Indonesian nation. As culturally marked subjects, Meratus can neither escape the nation-state nor be full-status participants in its programs.

In the 1980s, Meratus community leaders were involved in the active construction of a double consciousness in which political agency developed from the slippage between compliance with national demands and their contextual misplacement or reinterpretation. Rather than assuming the autonomy of a local knowledge, Meratus communities endorsed a distant, central knowledge even as they evaded its authority. Leaders portrayed themselves as state agents and called their leadership national compliance. Despite this, regional and national officials found this compliance completely unrecognizable; they saw only the ceremony of isolated, primitive custom. Was the Meratus reinterpretation of national policy deliberate or unwitting? Marginality develops precisely in that realm in which it is hard to say.

Both national officials and representatives of the regionally dominant ethnic group expect community leaders to be men, and they are rarely disappointed in dealing with Meratus. Yet rather different ideas about masculinity marked each side of interactions between Meratus men and their regional and national interlocutors. Within this gap, Meratus community leadership was constituted in mis- and re-interpretations of masculinity across ethnic and political lines.

Thus, for example, national officials expect community leaders to gather male family heads to instruct their wives to take birth control pills. Yet Meratus leaders are powerless at this task: there are no "families" of the sort that the government intends, and men are not "heads" over their wives and children. Besides, most politically active Meratus men want to have more children. This is a difficult context for the government vision of family planning; yet local leaders have little choice. A wily Meratus leader must figure out a way to please the state under Meratus conditions. One leader submitted a list of birth control acceptors and then stored the pills, permanently, in his house rafters. From his perspective, he had complied yet protected the community. No one was going to hike into the mountains to check up on him.¹⁰ Not all evasions, of course, are so successful.

Men face similar dilemmas as they cross ethnic lines within the South Kalimantan region; they must reinterpret powerful expectations of their masculinity in such a way as to make local sense of off-the-mark regional demands. A sense of the local depends on this interethnic interaction, with its ability to both confirm and transform dominant ethnic stereotypes. Indeed, uncertain negotia-

tions of local, regional, and national gender expectations shape the particular conditions of Meratus community formation.

As a woman, Uma Adang has had little opportunity to gain the power of ties with state officials or representatives of the region's majority. She is self-consciously unusual; her success in gathering a community has depended on her ability to fiddle with gender expectations and male privileges at every level. The parodic quality of her leadership rhetoric is more apparent, even exaggerated, than that of most of the male leaders I know, in part because she is cut off from the possibility of ever being recognized, regionally, as a legitimate leader. The awkwardness of her authority as a woman also turns her away from an individual negotiation of transethnic ties toward a more structural exposition of the relationship between the local community she imagines and the authority of the region and the state. Her commentary is informed by a serious acknowledgment of the intertwining of gender, ethnicity, and political status—as well as by simultaneous playful reinventions of all of these.

The next time I returned to Kalawan for another long stay, I was struck by how the community could also pass as an ordinary peasant village. In this quiet time, I joined daily tasks of fetching water and firewood; we discussed local marriages and ceremonies and the fluctuating price of peanuts (the local cash crop) at the nearest market. Uma Adang and I developed a gentler respect and affection for each other, and as I saw how her rhetoric could pass almost inconspicuously in and out of more "acceptable" political and religious forms, I was grateful that I had somehow managed a privileged glimpse of her most colorful side.

When a Javanese engineer came through Kalawan surveying the area as a possible transmigration site, he was entertained so conventionally by regional standards that I doubt if he saw anything other than a typical rural settlement. Here, parody became hard to differentiate from the expected rhetoric of acquiescence, as Uma Adang and other Kalawan leaders told the engineer how pleased they were that the central government had signed away their lands to 2000 Javanese settler families. They always benefited, they said, from the wisdom of the government. I believe the engineer got no hint of the anger and fear that had seized the community with the news of the transmigration agency's plans. But I was firmly reminded of the "ordinary" political context in Indonesia that made Uma Adang's strangest pronouncements seem sensible and creative interventions.

The transmigration location, incidentally, was later canceled, offering Kalawan a miraculous, if temporary, reprieve. The survey engineer told me bitterly that an important Javanese general had removed the area from the transmigration agency's domain by claiming it as his logging concession. Meanwhile, disastrous floods rolled into Kalawan, and we were up to our waists in water on the main trail. Uma Adang and her neighbors blamed the actions on a Japanese prospecting team representing a mining company interested in the gold and minerals of the sacred mountain at the headwaters of Kalawan's riv-

ers. The Japanese engineer, they said, had used a special "file" to look under the earth, where he had seen paired blocks of gold as big as rice mortars balanced on the horns of a fabled water serpent. The local people who had seen him called him a "hard" man. They predicted he would continue to ignore the dream warnings of the supernatural woman who guarded the mountain's treasures; he might not stop before he pulled out the key that closed off the mountain's internal winds and waters. The winds and waters would emerge and drown everyone in a great flood of which this was just a foretaste. Uma Adang planned to bring offerings to the mountain hoping to receive in return a timely warning of the coming disaster.

As I hiked upstream through the water with my belongings balanced on my head, I had to agree with Uma Adang's assessment that the flood was a transnational political event caused by inattention to local priorities—although I identified the chain of causality differently. Once I reached the mountains, I could see how the season's rains had hit recently abandoned logging roads (the company was Korean, not Japanese), causing dirt slides that took down the stumps and remaining trees and turned entire hillsides into rolling swamps of mud. And yet, I thought, one must consider that Uma Adang's "history" concerned the paradigmatic structures that brought the future as well as the past into the present, and so perhaps she wasn't wrong about the mining company as well . . .

Local/global analysis has been approached recently from two sometimes complementary, sometimes contradictory directions. One begins with European-inspired re-creations of the non-West; the other highlights non-Western reinterpretations and uses of Western discourses and institutions. Both can be productive. Yet to the extent that analysts working from each direction refuse self-consciousness about gender, each tends to reproduce dichotomies of external change versus indigenous practice that obscure the tensions of the formation of the local. As long as analysts take for granted the authority of male leaders to represent and protect their own cultures as they observe others, they fall easily into models of knowledge in which the specificity of other cultural interiors is known through an external, neutral, and universalized space of observation. This is not a useful model for understanding local/global cultural formation.

The two directions of analysis which I have mentioned speak to each other particularly clearly in the dialogue between Marshall Sahlins and Gananath Obeyesekere about the 18th-century arrival of Captain Cook in Hawaii. Uma Adang and Captain Cook have little to do with each other ethnographically and historically, but the recent dialogue, with its clarity as well as its prominence, can serve as an example for the re-theorization of gender.¹¹ How do assumptions about gender shape stories about Cook and about culture? And what would Uma Adang, or the Diamond Queen, or a feminist scholar, make of these stories?

Sahlins uses Cook's arrival to show the resilience of *Hawaiian* culture as it confronted and incorporated the foreign (1981, 1985); Obeyesekere uses Cook's arrival to show the resilience of *European* culture as it encountered and incorporated the foreign (1992). The Hawaiians, Sahlins says, received Cook as

their god Lono. In contrast, Obeyesekere argues that the idea that Cook was received as a god is a European myth that transforms the pragmatic strategies of Hawaiians into the sacred and exotic terrain of non-European Otherness. Both approaches offer important insights about cultural contact and change. Yet these insights naturalize male leadership and, with it, the stability of always already constituted "local" cultural communities. This does not help us see the formation of the local in the global.

Sahlins makes an elegant statement about the unpredictability of cultural reproduction (1981); local understandings are continually reformulated as their elements are redefined within newly arising practices and foreign sets of meanings. This useful insight for understanding the shifting terrain of the "local" is undermined, however, by gender-heavy dichotomies between the conditions of reproduction and the conditions of change. According to Sahlins, male chiefs have a special relationship to cultural structure. When the male Hawaiian chiefs meet the European explorer, Hawaiian culture is protected and reconfirmed; Cook becomes Lono. When the female Hawaiian commoners swim out to meet the European sailors, however, taboos are broken and Hawaiian culture is set on a course for change.

This gender dichotomy creates a story in which elite men form a wall of protection and a screen of representation for their culture. As long as European and Hawaiian men confront each other, Hawaiian culture remains intact. Yet history is made over women's bodies. Their miscegenation ushers in cultural hybridity and change. If I borrow the terminology of Greg Denning's book *Islands and Beaches* (1980), in which "islands" are sites of cultural integrity and "beaches" are zones of hybridity and change, then in Sahlins's story islands achieve their integrity as sites of male protection of women, while beaches are produced when women come under the influence of foreign men. In this story, male-defined cultures are walled cysts in the sea of change that may sometimes breach their borders. Yet this image forecloses the very dynamism of events and practices that Sahlins promotes.

If, instead of taking male cultural authority for granted, we focus on the ongoing construction of gender, the analytic gap between islands and beaches might not seem so wide. Instead of working with myths of men as natural representatives of whole cultures, one could begin by seeing both men and women as positioned social actors negotiating alien encounters across lines of gendered misunderstanding. Thus, even before Captain Cook's arrival, Hawaiian women broke taboos (Sahlins 1981:46); women's taboo-breaking meals with Cook's sailors were only the most recent chapter in a history of gender repositionings in relation to what might count as Hawaiian culture. At the same time, male chiefs' alliances with Europeans quickly produced *new* forms of elite masculinity. Imagining Hawaiian culture as a cyst in a sea of change is possible only by silencing gendered arguments.

Gananath Obeyesekere usefully reminds us that Europeans had culture too (1992). Yet Obeyesekere, like Sahlins, works with a model that naturalizes masculinity and makes men the unquestioned and sole representatives of whole cul-

tures. For Obeyesekere, Cook's relationship to European culture is much like the position of male chiefs to Hawaiian culture for Sahlins; the story of the male leader is the story of the culture.

Instead, what if we were to see the story of Cook's apotheosis within emergent and contested narratives of European masculinity? For a sharply contrasting version of the gender dimensions of Enlightenment narratives, I think of Jean Taylor's history of 18th-century Batavia (1984). There, European men were incorporated into colonial hierarchies through marriage into powerful female-focused mestizo families. She suggests that these men became involved in the Enlightenment through white men's clubs that allowed them to run from the influence of their mixed-race wives. "Europe," like "the Indies," was a gendered colonial invention in a transcontinental conversation. Although narratives of Cook's adventures describe quite a different setting, they too must have developed in a context of contested tellings of the presence of Europeans in the world, not all of which posited the autonomy of Europe as a masculine agent. Aggressively masculine tales of exploration created the neutral eye of Europe gazing across marked and feminized non-European bodies. The reinvention of "man" in Hawaii was not just a European myth told again, but a silencing of gender alternatives.

One of the advantages of imagining cultural process through stories of encounters between women is that it is less possible, within anthropological writing, to naturalize the cultural authority of women as so easily happens for men. It never occurred to me that Uma Adang "represented" her culture in any simple sense. My attention to her uneasy authority as a female leader led me to see the awkwardness with which she could tentatively constitute a community that counted as a local culture—for me, for other ethnic groups, or for the state. Furthermore, my own authority as an anthropologist carries some of this same awkwardness. Unlike Captain Cook, I could not go to the Meratus Mountains as a fully empowered representative of Western knowledge-making. The ethnographic space Uma Adang and I crafted between us was one in which it was exceptionally clear that the negotiation of gender and the negotiation of what counts as a local culture within a wider field happened together. And, although these negotiations may be particularly obvious in thinking about culture through conversations between women, there is no reason not to notice them in our thinking about culture through conversations between men.

As for Uma Adang, she might enjoy reinterpreting the encounter between Captain Cook and the Hawaiian chiefs. Certainly, she is an expert at deflating and deflecting this kind of cross-cultural confrontation. Once I saw her intervene in a tense conversation between Muslim and non-Muslim men, the latter Meratus and the former from the regional majority group. The conversation turned to the regionally serious business of comparison between circumcised and uncircumcised penises. Uma Adang was irreverent. "As for me," she said, "I can't really tell the difference."

A long time ago, Uma Adang tells, the rain wouldn't stop, and there was no rice. Datu Limbur was sent by the people with a bottle of gold dust and a diamond to obtain a king from the royal center in Banjarmasin. He rafted along the east coast on a raft of nine dammar logs, and he followed the same route back with the king. But the king died en route. The rain still wouldn't stop. So Datu Limbur set out again with two bottles of gold dust, two diamonds, and a great gold belt buckle. This time he got Ratu Intan, the Diamond Queen, and she successfully hiked over the rough mountains from the west side to her new seat in Uma Adang's area. She instituted the rituals still performed today, bringing law, ceremony, and well-being to the local area.

The imagined imperial center empowers the local kingdom. But the local kingdom can also disturb the plan of empire by its very remoteness. The chosen prince dies on his way there, despite the fact that he takes the sensible easy route along the east coast. Only the princess survives, and she has walked the rugged trails across the entire mountain landscape. She rules the kingdom, then, with a daughter's voice: that voice that cracks at the moment of enunciation to reveal the split between the questionable power of the speaker and the unquestionable firmness of the father's law. She is a woman who never seems to have had children. She is not a maternal figure or an ancestor in anyone's direct line. It is unclear if she was ever married. She began everything that can be called "local": not only ritual and custom, but also that knowledge of connection to a wider historical scene from which "local" predicaments spring. Perhaps the contradiction of daughterly rule is one way of thinking about why everything "local" here is always slightly askew.

The Diamond Queen rules over wobbly reproductions; she ushers in structure and history repeating themselves inaccurately. She is the queen of utopian commitments to unpredictable and newly inflected repetitions. She is also the queen that makes it possible for local history to be told at all. I think of her as the patron of the irregular authority of stories, like those I learned working with Uma Adang, that tell of out-of-the-way places, of the gendered specificity of local/global processes, and more generally, of the dilemmas and paradoxes of marginality.

Notes

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1. For anthropological world systems theories, see Wolf 1982. For anthropological attention to the spread of modernity, see Rabinow 1988. For the cultural studies/anthropology bridge in studies of global culture, see Appadurai 1990.

2. For example, Baudrillard 1988, Tomlinson 1991, and Mazlish 1993.

3. A somewhat more fully developed version of this history can be found in the introduction to part I of Tsing 1993.

4. *Dayak* refers to non-Muslim indigenous inhabitants of Borneo; *Kaharingan* refers to traditional Dayak religion, particularly in Central Kalimantan.

5. Benedict Anderson offers a thoughtful introduction to the colonial establishment of concepts of majority and minority ethnicity in Southeast Asia (1987).

6. The proliferation of classificatory difference in Dutch scholarship on Indonesian cultures is particularly evident in colonial-era studies of *adat* (customary law) (see Boon 1977:52–53; Tsing 1993a). *Adat* studies were key to colonial administration as well as anthropological scholarship. *Adat* scholars tended to see their work as a form of advocacy for local peoples and their cultures. However, many Indonesian nationalists of the mid–20th century saw cultural classification as a “divide-and-rule” colonial project. In contrast to *adat* scholarship, colonial-era Dutch studies of Indonesian mythology and marriage exchange—early works in the structuralist tradition—used principles of endlessly ramifying difference not so much to classify cultures as to analyze their interworkings. Notions of difference in each of these kinds of study were, however, quite related.

7. See, for example, the *adat* scholarship of Mohammad Koesnoe (1971). A fuller analysis of this shift is available in a forthcoming article (Tsing 1993a).

8. Thus in an article in *Local Knowledge* (1983:167–234), Geertz is critical of Dutch academic styles and praises Koesnoe’s reworking of the concept of *adat* (see footnote 7).

9. Here, I am not referring specifically to the organization or journal of that name but to the more general images and ideas popularly invoked by the term, as well as its use within various indigenous peoples movements.

10. This incident is described in more detail in chapter 3 of Tsing 1993b.

11. This section of the essay draws from my conversations with Sylvia Yanagisako. I am grateful for her inspiration but, of course, take full responsibility for my mistakes.

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