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JEALOUS WOMEN IN THE CANE

It has been Sidney Mintz's project of historical anthropology to explore and explain the Caribbean as modernity's first site. By the second quarter of the seventeenth century, it was a place largely conquered and depopulated by disease and war—a veritable tabula rasa. It was a place to which Africans and, eventually, Asians (after the mid-nineteenth century) were brought by slavery and indenture to labor on plantations so as to produce commodities of significance to a European market (first sugar, rum, molasses, tobacco, cotton, indigo, and coffee, and then bananas, pineapples, coconuts, and nutmeg). It was a place in which these laborers, displaced from kin and custom and unfamiliar with one another, had to forge new relationships under conditions of agro-industrial discipline. In fact, these plantations often strived to become "forcing houses for changing of per-

sons" (Goffman 1961: 12): persons changed into modern subjects with "new lifeways attitudes about individuality, about the nature of human relations and about the significance of cultural differences" (Mintz 1996: 296).¹ They became "adept at forming relationships quickly, especially dyadic relationships. Because the basis for operating in terms of known status categories was under constant pressure from migration and external coercion, they had to learn to deal socially with others, often in the absence of culturally-specific preconceptions about the meanings of individual differences in age, gender or physical variety" (296).

The initial modernity Mintz documents is thus one in which those to become the first proletarians learned new ways of socializing, new modes of working, new manners of coping with rapid social change. And because these peoples of the Caribbean had so long been modern—"alien but not exotic," as David Scott puts it (2004: 191)—they were of relatively little interest to anthropologists until lately. They were certainly not nearly as interesting as, for example, those recently contacted and culturally distinct peoples of Papua New Guinea (PNG). After all, and a point we will return to, it was in contrast to places like PNG, with their "kinship systems, costumes, coiffures, cuisines, languages, beliefs, and customs of dizzying variety and allure" that the Caribbean lacked anthropological allure: it "looked rather too much like a culturally burned-over, secondhand, unpriestine world . . . midway between there and here—everything was alloyed, mixed, ground down, pasted on, the least common denominator" (Mintz 2002: xv–xvi).

The modernist story Mintz tells about the Caribbean encompasses 400 years and links hemispheres, classes, and practices of consumption in important relationships of inequality. In this story, Mintz seeks to understand these relationships—these linked lives—through a focus on both broader systems and human experience. Mintz's concern with human experience—ultimately with ethnography—is perhaps best exemplified in his remarkable life history of Zayas Alvarado, known as Don Taso, a worker in the cane fields of Puerto Rico. In *Worker in the Cane* (1974), Mintz documents the twentieth-century changes lived through by Taso and his compatriots in Barrio Jauca after the United States assumed sovereignty of Puerto Rico in 1899. These changes involved a shift from a hacienda-based, plantation economy characterized by personal relationships between owners (or managers) and their worker-clients to a corporation-based one characterized by standardized relationships between employers and workers. As Don Taso speaks of his experiences of living through and working in these different regimes, Mintz is careful to

note that Taso is "not an 'average' anything—neither an average man, nor an average Puerto Rican, not an average lower-class, sugar cane worker" (1974: 11). Yet Mintz believes that Taso's experiences are generalizable to workers in the cane throughout the Caribbean and elsewhere. Moreover, he also believes that Taso's experiences can be understood and empathized with by others, including by those who seemingly benefit from the conditions under which such workers labor. This is to say, Mintz's project is to show how world historical processes are embodied (processes both of modernity in general and agro-industrial plantation life in particular): to show how the not-so-hidden injuries of class (and, to a lesser extent, race) actually "hurt" (Sennett and Cobb 1973)—and link.

And as we look at Mintz's vivid portrayal of Taso's life, we do clearly see one who has struggled for survival, sociality, and significance within parameters shaped by the long-term plantation processes of modernity, even as these processes continued to shift by becoming ever more solidified and rationalized. However, one significant dimension of Taso's modernist experience remains sketchy in Mintz's account. This concerns probably the most important of his "dyadic relationships," that with his common-law wife, Doña Elisabeth, or "Elí." Although *Worker in the Cane* includes some discussion about and several interviews with her—mostly about her jealous rages—she appears underexamined. While outspoken, Elí remains enigmatic. (This is perhaps not surprising because, when Mintz wrote about her, anthropology rarely inquired closely into women's experiences.) But though Elí is seemingly more idiosyncratic than even Taso, her experiences strike us as telling about the connection between system and experience under conditions of modernity, about feasible forms of plantation-based, gendered, dyadic relationships.

In the spirit of Mintz's project to understand in a comparative way conditions of agro-industrial modernity, to explore global interconnections, to give voice to those otherwise unheard, and to revisit the anthropological appraisal of the familiar and the strange, the burned over and the exotic, we will explore the lives of women like Elí in a context both similar to and informatively distinct from the Caribbean. Our context is also a sugar plantation, yet one located in PNG, far from the Caribbean with its 400 years of sedimented modernity. Ramu Sugar Limited (RSL) was begun as a nationalist project shortly after PNG's independence from Australia in 1975. Indeed, its creation was encouraged by nationalists and development experts in order to catapult Papua New Guineans from the tribal into the modern. If the Caribbean was, from Mintz's perspective, the first modernity, PNG has been, from the perspective of many, "the last un-

known" (Souter 1963)—the last to become modern. As such, the women at RSL should be encountering, if not improvising, variants of the feasible forms of plantation-based, gendered, dyadic relationships with which Elí had been long familiar. After learning more about Elí's life in Puerto Rico, we will turn to the lives of such women in PNG—and, eventually, consider how voices of women from these places may inform contemporary anthropology's sense of what is current.

OF JEALOUS WOMEN IN THE FIRST MODERNITY

Mintz tells us, in his introduction to *Worker in the Cane*, that he formally interviewed Doña Elí only for several hours. He found her a refreshing contrast to Taso because "Elí likes to express feelings and likes to suggest that forces move in her and about her over which she can exercise little control" (1974: 10). He also describes her as remarkably jealous of Taso: "it seems clear that Elí's jealousy was possibly inappropriate and certainly excessive" (17). As such, her jealousy appears so idiosyncratic, and she so imbalanced, as to require little further discussion. But we wonder otherwise. We think that she was able to exercise quite a bit of control by being out-of-control and that her jealousy, while perhaps extreme, might be less readily dismissed as idiosyncratic and more accurately contemplated as exemplary. First, some facts both general and specific about marriage in this Puerto Rican modernity.

Taso was Elí's second husband. They had known each other since childhood but had only fallen in love when she returned to the Barrio after her first marriage failed. Because Elí was a *mujer de estado* (a woman who had previously lived in a marital union), Taso did not have to carry her off as if she were a *señorita*. Instead, they simply moved in with her mother (until they could acquire a house of their own) and commenced to work together, ultimately bringing up nine children. (Three others died in early childhood.) Taso labored at various physically demanding and poorly paid jobs in the cane. Elí took care of the house and children and also earned money through the sale of beverages, salt cod salad, cakes made of mashed plantain and meat, and lottery tickets. They never formalized their union: Elí's mother did not have the resources to insist that Taso marry her daughter by civil ceremony so as to establish Elí's legal claim upon him for child support if they separated.

It was not uncommon in the Barrio for men to take several wives. Taso's father had a mistress. Cornelio, Taso's sister's common-law husband, carried off another woman, Nenita, to whom he did formalize his union with-

out ever fully abandoning his first wife. Indeed, "the marriage relationship in Barrio Jauca is very brittle" (Mintz 1974: 92). In Mintz's 1948 sample of 60 couples, he found that there had been 183 marriages, counting a marriage by each individual as one marriage. This is to say, each marriage partner had been married on the average of one and one-half times. Yet marriage was both normative and necessary—and, in Mintz's view, family was "the most important single social institution in the lives of the people" (1956: 375). Young couples wanted children as soon as possible, and it took the labor of both husbands and wives for these rural proletarians to eke out livings for themselves and their families. At the time of Mintz's study, so preoccupied were they with ensuring the basics that material aspirations were minimal. Indeed, "radios appear to represent a real symbol of conspicuous consumption since no economic saving can be derived through their use" (375). It is not surprising, thus, that many married women—certainly those with children and past an easily marriageable age—actively defended what they had.

Elí clearly wanted to hold on to Taso. In fact, she was extraordinarily jealous of him, even by local standards. As Taso explains:

But Elisabeth was a thoroughly jealous woman—not only of some particular girl but of any woman with whom I might be talking. That would be enough for a fight and a vicious one—and so we were fighting for years, and it was a terrible struggle, what with her jealousy. That began almost from the moment we started to live together. That was about 1927, and in the 1940s Elisabeth was still that way. . . . And in that period of time I suffered greatly, and so did she. That was a regular war. If I got home feeling calm, the woman would be invidious and then there would be a fight. It was one of our greatest problems. As she knew there were girls I had fallen for in the past, she believed that at any moment, well—as you know, there are so many cases here where a man carries off a girl now. And then his woman [i.e., a prior common-law wife] is left behind. (Mintz 1974: 102–3)

And Elí concurred with Taso's characterization both of her and of what drove her behavior. Indeed, she told Mintz several stories about the lengths she had gone—and presumably would go—to prevent Taso from becoming involved with other women.

Let me tell you what happened only a little after we began to live together. My brother was a barber, and I stole a razor from his

barber box. And my brother missed the razor, and he said, "Someone took a razor from my barber box and I need it." And I had the razor here [she points to her blouse] and I didn't tell him I had it. I told no one. I didn't want anyone to know that I had it because I had a bad thought in my head. I was being unjustly jealous of Taso. . . . I thought he was with another woman; but actually he was not out with any woman. My jealousy had blinded me, I had this hallucination that I saw him with—with a woman I was jealous of, you see. And I believed I could surprise him walking along the road and talking with her. It was when he went off to the burial of that infant of Cornelio's who had died. . . . You remember, we told you of one occasion when Cornelio beat up . . . his legal wife? Well, that was the child she had in her belly at the time. . . . Taso went to the funeral and I was jealous of a particular woman; and I knew he would have to come back from the cemetery on foot. I awaited their return. I thought, they are going to come along here feeling fine, along the road, talking and falling in love, and I don't know what else. And so I hid myself under a culvert, in a drain pipe. . . . And I waited. But they didn't pass by; I believe they came back in a car—I don't remember for sure, but I know I didn't see them go by. And finally I came back along the road and came home. When I got tired of prowling about with that razor because no one came, well, I returned, and I put the razor back in Mariano's barber box. . . . They questioned me to see if I had it and I said no. . . . And I had this maliciousness, apart from being jealous. Taso has never been an argumentative man, but at times there would be fights in the house because of my jealousy, you see. (Mintz 1974, 106–8)

But, Elí was far from the only Jauqueño woman, even in Taso's immediate orbit, to forcefully protect what she saw as hers. Thus, Taso reports that Cornelio's legal wife, Nenita, once ran

out of the house and was waiting for him in ambush on a path in the cane. And when he passed by, she attacked him with a knife. And they fell to fighting, and according to what he told us afterwards, he said he struck her, and she went head over heels. She went running from there, along what we call a *maclaine* in the cane field. And he turned around and came back to our house with a knife wound in his palm. There in the fight they had she had also managed to bite him, and then he came back to our home to cure himself. (Mintz 1974: 48–49)

These accounts of jealous women are consistent with Mintz's general framework concerning a plantation-based modernity among the rural proletariat: social ties were largely dyadic; kinship was shallow; nuclear families were central; disputes did not ramify much; access to significant resources was constrained; day-to-day survival, rather than aspiration for consumption, was central. People were left to their own devices to negotiate their own interests, to stake out claims—with the threats of razors and knives, if necessary. But, importantly, the jealous attacks lightly wounded rather than maimed—served warning rather than seriously alienated. Elí was, we suggest, not pathological. She was prototypic—and we find her echoes not only in the likes of Nenita, but also among women on the other side of the world in an emerging, yet contemporary, plantation-focused modernity. As we shall see, all used displays of emotion as a performative strategy to keep what they had or to get what they wanted.

TOWARD MODERNITY AT RAMU SUGAR LIMITED

RSL, as we have said, was built to be a centerpiece in newly independent PNG's nationalist project. Achieving independence in 1975, relatively late in world history, PNG urgently wanted to develop and to avoid the mistakes in development made by other former colonies.² It wanted to catch up to and to learn from the errors of the rest.³ Created as both a grand project and a semipublic/semiprivate, for-profit enterprise, RSL became a major—although often contested—component of these endeavors. Significantly, it was to be unlike sugar operations elsewhere, rooted as most of them were in a grim colonial past. It was instead supposed to bring enlightened capitalist prosperity—good wages, technical skills, and a modern infrastructure—to a wide range of Papua New Guineans as well as to transform a region deemed remote, underpopulated, and underutilized.

In addition (consistent with a national policy of furthering import substitution through the implementation of protective tariffs), RSL was created to bring national self-sufficiency in a major commodity. Sugar, with such other imports as rice and canned mackerel, was already becoming central to the diet of PNG's swelling urban population. Moreover, self-sufficiency in sugar would have important symbolic value: it would be a particularly appropriate assertion of national will. After all, sugar was originally domesticated in PNG (some 8,000 years ago). Furthermore, sugar was a major export of Australia, and Australia, it was thought, had protected its overseas market by stifling the development of a sugar industry in its (now former) *de facto* PNG colony. It was not surprising,

therefore, that for advice concerning the creation of its sugar industry, PNG sought out not an Australian-based firm, but a British-based one. It chose Booker Agriculture International, a company (that, perhaps not unexpectedly, began in the Caribbean) with much experience in establishing sugar plantations in developing countries—and that would eventually help establish RSL and provide many of its corporate managers.⁴

RSL thus became a Papua New Guinean, agro-industrial sugar complex, staffed by thousands of Papua New Guinean “nationals” from all over the country as well as by “expatriates” from many parts of the world. RSL’s expatriate planners constructed a place where Papua New Guinean employees would learn not only the modern technical skills and disciplines necessary to grow, process, and package sugar but also the modern civic values necessary to work and reside in a new form of multiethnic community. In forming such a community, the mostly male employees and their family members were, at least during the time of employment at RSL, to leave behind primordial and parochial allegiances to diverse and dispersed villages and clans; concurrently, they were to develop a generalized and unitary commitment to RSL—the township and the community. (And, by extension, they were to develop an analogous commitment to the new nation itself, as a place and as a people.)

Because the RSL township was freshly constructed on a seemingly empty plain, its planners literally designed it from the ground up to further their objectives. Thus, the dwellings were built as self-contained and complete—with modern and free utilities (water, electricity, plumbing, and garbage collection). Each dwelling was assigned to a single, economically self-sufficient nuclear family. (A family was defined in the employees handbook as “one husband or one wife and dependent children” [RSL 1993: 4].) Any visitors, especially clansmen but even members of an extended family, were to be registered and allowed to stay for no more than three weeks. And, as a further effort to displace prior allegiances and encourage new forms of sociability, dwellings were arranged around common greens to form neighborhoods, and families were allocated to these residences so as to avoid any tribal or even regional concentrations. This all was central to the vision of RSL: a modernist place where Papua New Guineans of all sorts could learn to live the good and well-regulated life—the pleasant and reasonable life. At such a place, the murky welter of indigenous habits, preferences, and arrangements would (supposedly) yield to the transparently rational disjunctions of Western modes of production, reproduction, and distribution—of work and leisure, workplace and home, worker and wife, (male) wage-earner and (female) dependent.

Times have, of course, changed; objectives have been modified or only partly realized. Policies of comparative advantage have replaced those of import substitution as neoliberalism has come to define the conditions of development in the contemporary world system—as the powerful likes of the World Trade Organization, World Bank, and Coca-Cola Amatil have come to attack the tariff protection that makes the production of RSL’s “expensive” sugar feasible.⁵ Yet, though under assault, RSL is one of the few large institutions in PNG that (as of our last visit) still works, and one that, unlike most mining locations in the country, does not destroy the ecosystem. Moreover, RSL still provides a relatively pleasant and reasonable environment for its workers (with good security, a health clinic, decent schools, and many churches): one that makes it a desirable—and exciting—location for many—both for the predominantly male workers and for the women who become their wives.

JEALOUS WOMEN IN A NEW MODERNITY

The modernist nuclear family-centered ideal implemented by RSL’s designers has been more frequently realized among PNG employees in the supervisory and managerial ranks—among those from whom more is expected in conformity to official standards. Among the majority of workers other arrangements often prevail. Their houses recurrently overflow with visiting kin. Their families sometimes include several wives—the company has come to tolerate polygyny if the co-wives live together peacefully in the single dwelling allotted to each worker. And workers’ households frequently ebb and flow as women come and go.

According to the judge of the district court located in the township, RSL’s “industrial” circumstances produce an unusually large number of adultery cases. These cases are often disputes between women, regarded as “Ramu wives,” in which each seeks to control a worker’s real—though definitely limited—assets (as, again, most of those without nuclear families solidly in evidence are in the lower pay grades). A woman who becomes such a Ramu wife usually arrives at RSL to visit a “brother” who works there. She then takes up with one of his “unmarried” coworkers who may or may not have a wife back home in his village—a village wife with whose kin he has established ongoing social relationships through the transfer of bridewealth. If at all possible, the prospective Ramu wife moves in with him. If matters are congenial, he will often give a little money to her brother as a (kind of) bridewealth. This creates a “marriage in the Ramu way”—one that may last for weeks, or years, and often

results in children—but rarely involves exchange relationships between kin groups. Frequently a worker establishes several such Ramu marriages during the course of his employment at RSL, since there are many women willing to become Ramu wives.

The women's willingness derives from many factors. Money has become significant to all Papua New Guineans, no matter where they live—to pay school fees and to buy the likes of clothing, rice, soap, kerosene, and flashlight batteries. In addition, money is also necessary for bridewealth and other ritual prestations. And despite some cash cropping, most money comes from selling labor outside of the village context. Consequently, men are often away working in towns, at mines, or on plantations (such as RSL). Since much of what the men earn goes for their own subsistence—and pleasure—their remittances to families back home in villages may be meager and irregular. Moreover, towns have an allure as places both to make money and to spend money—or at least look at things one would like to have, or taste, or fantasize about. In short, in contemporary PNG, as money becomes evermore necessary and commodities—and consumer choice—evermore enticing, villages are likely seen as money-short backwaters. As such, it is not only men but, increasingly, women who seek escape from what some Papua New Guineans feel is “the last corner”—the place that has been left behind.

Relatedly, women may wish to escape from the drudgery of village subsistence (gardening, collecting firewood, fetching water). They may also wish to escape from the onerous and sometimes repressive control of clan elders who seek to maintain influence through managing junior women, including arranging their marriages. As one of our Papua New Guinean friends put it, she left the village because she did not want to be forced to marry an old man she did not like and who would ensorcel her if she refused (Gewertz and Errington 1991: 108). Or, as Wardlow found, women did not want to be forced, sometimes violently, to subordinate their desires to the needs of their families and clans without the reciprocity of nurture and protection that absent brothers or husbands were unable to provide (2006).⁶ In addition, women (and, of course, men) may wish access to viable educational and medical facilities—both increasingly absent in the Papua New Guinean hinterland.

In such a contemporary PNG, RSL strongly attracts women: it promises freedom from the limitations and constraints, from the burdens and coercions, of village life; it promises a modernist lifestyle, one of convenient markets and services, indoor plumbing, running water, electricity, refrigeration, and new social possibilities—as well as connection to a wider

world where things are happening.⁷ And there is no doubt that many RSL-employed men see the availability of these women as “perks” of their jobs. After all, it is a place where women compete for access to men.⁸ Of course, such competition is frequent worldwide given that gender-based disparity in access to economic resources is cross-culturally common. And certainly throughout PNG women may compete in noisy contention and assertion with each other over a range of resources (men included). Yet, RSL provides a context where such contentions and assertions can especially flourish: where it can become not only strenuous and open, but prolonged and pervasive—extended throughout a range of venues. RSL is a place, unlike many elsewhere in PNG and beyond, where women—regardless of whether they are “under the legs” (Wardlow 2006: 12) of their fathers, brothers, or husbands—are *relatively* unafraid of sexual violence. Violence at RSL on the part of a man who decided that he had heard more than enough from a particular woman would likely lead to intervention by neighbors, sanction by the court, and termination of employment by the company.

We are interested in these women's contentions and assertions at RSL. As both Eli and Nenita would likely recognize, for women to claim resources from specific men at RSL requires serving public (if not spectacular) notice not only to their men but also to their lurking competitors. That modernity at RSL is less harsh, still emergent, and—as we will see—more consumption focused than that at the Barrio Jauca will, of course, inflect that ways and forms by which such notice is served. At RSL such notice involves the successful—thoroughly convincing—performance of a particular and gendered domestic role: that of aggrieved wife in contrast to that of just a Ramu wife, little more than a jealous girlfriend. The successful performance of this role frequently demands that a woman risk taking her Ramu husband (along with his lover) to court so as to test her claims on him. By vociferously asserting her rights as a wife in court, a woman hopes to convince others that she has the rights of a wife: by portraying her husband and his lover as adulterers, she hopes to present herself as a married woman; by vilifying her husband's lover as a home breaker, she hopes to establish herself as a homemaker. The court, in effect, is a public stage on which women must perform extended dramatic renditions of domestic lives so as to continue meeting the exigencies of everyday life. In other words, to perform gender successfully at RSL, women must command a repertoire ranging from the histrionic to the cheerfully down-to-earth. Below we provide an example of an extended performance of the high end of the scale—the aria, as it were.

Hundreds of people got caught up in the spectacle of the competing claims of Angela and Elizabeth over Peter, a (modestly paid) grade-six forklift operator at RSL.⁹ Each of the three was from a different Highlands cultural group and each had some relatives living at the company: Angela, a brother; Peter, several kinsmen; Elizabeth, an ex-husband. And there were interested friends, neighbors, and work mates. During the several weeks that the three wrangled in court, many of these people composed an audience and a number testified. In addition, members of the general public became caught up in the spectacle. These included those who watched Elizabeth's and Angela's vociferous encounters at the market where each went daily to sell used clothes. In one instance that generated its own separate court case, Elizabeth sought to humiliate her adversary publicly by picking up Angela's skirt. This occurred, it perhaps should be mentioned, after Angela screamed out that Elizabeth was other men's canned fish. Both inside and outside the courtroom, the judge and bystanders (ourselves included) saw the two women vividly perform their lives—and give the performances of their lives.

This was the gist of the (often-gripping, undeniably entertaining) courtroom testimony: Angela denounced Peter and Elizabeth's affair as adulterous. After all, Angela and Peter had been married for eleven years—and he had given her brother money as bridewealth. But Elizabeth had seduced him away after leaving her own husband, Ebit—thus wrecking two homes. Elizabeth was jealous of Angela and her marriage because Ebit had never paid even a small bridewealth for her. Furthermore, Peter had abandoned their daughter, Jennifer, leaving her hungry: all of his resources were going instead to Elizabeth and her six children.

Peter countered that he was not an adulterer but had taken a second wife. He had paid K(ina)1,000 in bridewealth for Elizabeth in accord with PNG custom. (In 2000, K1.00 was worth approximately US\$0.30.) In addition, he had also observed PNG custom by giving Angela K1,800 to show respect to her as his first wife and to assuage any ill feelings she might have. He had paid this money to her and could prove it. He had not wished to abandon her. Rather, he had been forced from his house when Angela attacked him with a knife—a scar on his hand was evidence of this assault.

Angela interrupted by shouting, "No!" Peter had not compensated her and had cut himself when he grabbed a knife she was holding. She re-

peated that he was not providing for their child. In fact, the money he had given Elizabeth, supposedly as bridewealth, had been taken from a savings account that he had set up for Jennifer as "birthday money." And Angela demanded additional compensation from Peter because, on the three occasions when the police had arrested them for fighting in public, it had been she who had been put in jail and fined.

In the course of hearing this testimony, the judge pursued a number of points he considered substantive. Important among these was whether Peter and Angela had been married in church. If so, Peter could not take an additional wife. However, if he had not been married in church, and if polygyny was allowed by his group (which it was), then he could do so. Although initially claiming that a pastor had presided over their wedding, Angela eventually was forced to agree with Peter (who claimed to be a heathen) that a pastor had merely blessed their marriage. Thus, Angela conceded that Peter could legally take a second wife if he wished. But she continued to insist that Peter had never compensated her—nor was he supporting their daughter. A witness was called who testified that, indeed, Peter had given Angela a handful of K50 notes in front of the local supermarket. The judge questioned both the witness and Peter persistently about this, especially about the fact that both could recollect few details. What day and what time of day did the compensation take place? A transaction of this size and nature should remain quite memorable. And who else was present? Why wasn't Angela's brother there? Or an officer of the court to lend the event formal weight? And why was a transaction involving this amount of money taking place among the throngs outside the store? Angela grinned with evident satisfaction at the judge's skepticism. But Peter responded that he did not remember the exact details because he had lots on his mind. Moreover, it had been Angela who had requested such a relatively anonymous transaction because she did not want to share the money with her brother.

The judge frequently struggled to establish not only the facts of the case, but order in the court. He was hard-pressed to maintain a semblance of legal procedure—forced to insist again and again that, for example, questions be asked only about the testimony given, and that statements could not be made in the place of asking questions. At one point he confessed with rueful humor that he had become a bit loopy himself about the sequence of events, what with everyone talking at once. On another occasion, he simply stopped taking notes as heated assertions met with vehement denials in a crescendo of claims and counter-claims. After a very

full day of testimony, the judge adjourned the case, saying that he would deliver his verdict the following week.

The verdict proved generally in Angela's favor. The judge ruled that, rather than having established a polygynous marriage, Peter and Elizabeth had committed adultery and must each pay Angela compensation. Crucially, he simply did not find Peter's testimony—nor that of his lone witness (who, the judge pointed out, was a relative)—credible that Angela had received K1800 in compensation. The evidence just did not add up. Nor was there any real proof that Peter had paid bridewealth for Elizabeth. No witnesses were called to substantiate this. And, of course, Elizabeth would lie about it because she had been frustrated and angry at Ebit's failure to pay bridewealth. Moreover, even if Peter had given her money, it would not qualify as a bridewealth unless others had been there to consolidate and strengthen the marriage. So Angela was still married to Peter. If she wished to pursue a divorce, that was up to her. However, this was not a divorce case.

But the judge wanted to make something else clear to this still-married couple. In a manner consistent with RSL's founding values, he told Angela that she was also at fault. She was cruel to Peter and cut him with a knife. She did not care about human life and took the law into her own hands. She did not make a lovely home to which a man could return after work to rest. And Peter became afraid: he worried that the next night she might cut off his ear or his head. Eventually, he left home and had been enticed by another woman. And adultery had occurred. How much, then, did Peter and Elizabeth owe Angela? The judge did not want to fine them so much that they would find it a hardship to pay. The court, he stressed, was not a financial institution. It was not a place to make a profit; it was a place to seek justice. It was a place to come so as to get back what you have lost. So after calculating what Elizabeth likely earned in selling clothes at the market and what Peter earned fortnightly, he decided that each must pay Angela K300.

To the surprise of no one in the court room, this decision did not settle all between Angela, Elizabeth, and Peter. Soon afterward, Angela and Peter appeared again in court concerning unresolved issues focusing on the ownership and disposition of domestic property. This time it was Peter bringing the case. Angela had sold property belonging to him—in particular, a TV set worth K425, a refrigerator worth K400, and a sewing machine worth K150. The judge requested receipts and adjourned the case until these could be brought in the afternoon. The afternoon court session proved one squabble after another over such matters as whether

the sewing machine in question was the first or second one that Angela had used. And was it the one that cost K70 or K150? And who had helped carry the refrigerator from Peter's house while he was at work? And whose labor had paid for these items? The judge frequently reminded everyone that there were procedures to follow: he gestured to the flag of PNG that hung behind him and admonished the arguing parties not to disrespect the country it represented by fighting in front of the flag. Finally, he told Angela and Peter to settle down and come back the following week. The court adjourned.

We left RSL before the case resumed. Two years later, when we again came into the lives of Angela, Peter, and Elizabeth, we learned that Angela was employed as a maid at the RSL guesthouse. She greeted us cordially. When asked how she was, she said that she and Peter were still married and living together. And her income was helping support the whole household—Elizabeth and her children included.

NO TAMMY WYNETTE HERE

Although Angela was distressed by Peter's affair with Elizabeth, it did provide her with a useful opportunity to demonstrate that she had over the course of the relationship become enough of a wife that she could bring adultery charges against him and his girlfriend. This is to say, she felt she could and must claim full membership in a conventional category instantiated at RSL through residence in a family dwelling and support by a wage-earner. Her action did, however, carry risks: if she were to fail in her claim and antagonize Peter, she would be much worse off than before. Certainly we have seen the judge dismiss charges of adultery brought by women he saw as just Ramu wives, as women not significantly different from girlfriends. But Angela's charge and the evidence that they had been together eleven years did place Peter in an awkward position. Rather than admit adultery, he had to demonstrate publicly that he had been able to make both women his real (not just his Ramu) wives. Yet he simply lacked the resources to do this in a way that convinced the judge.

With this outcome, Angela felt vindicated. She had managed a first-rate performance as an aggrieved wife with recognized rights to Peter and what he brought with him at RSL. Yet neither Elizabeth nor Peter seemed dispirited by the way the case had gone. For her part, Elizabeth had shown that she could compel Peter and was not cowed by Angela—indeed, she had given Angela a run for her (or Peter's) money. And Peter had demonstrated that he was a man of means (with not just a paycheck, but also a TV,

refrigerator, and several sewing machines), had two women fighting over him, and was at least a contender as a polygynist. In fact, all had given the most effective performances they could within the context of being Papua New Guinean women and men at RSL. This perhaps explains something that initially puzzled us. After the very first time we had seen Angela, Peter, and Elizabeth in action in the court, they always greeted us as if we had all become friends: sometimes waving from a distance; sometimes coming up to shake hands and chat. They never seemed embarrassed that we (and many others) had witnessed what might be described elsewhere as having their dirty linen aired in public. At one point during the trial, Elizabeth actually checked to make sure that we had spelled Peter's last name correctly for inclusion in our book, as if to insure proper screen credits for his performance. (We should mention that, though we doubt that our presence as part of the audience enhanced the dramatic intensity of the occasion, it may have made the performances somewhat more challenging for the players, especially initially.)

When we first began thinking about this case and the comparable ones we witnessed at RSL, the work of Judith Butler (1990) came to mind. It was Butler, after all, who argued that gender was performative and who advocated that feminists engage in "gender trouble" by breaking from hegemonic gender scripts. Interestingly, Angela's performance at RSL was successful precisely because she caused trouble, but not gender trouble. She performed what she, as a PNG woman, understood to be the conventional role of an outraged and indignant wife in order to get what she wanted and needed at RSL.¹⁰ In this regard (if we might continue in the spirit of playful performativity), she seemed to be acting as one of Andrea Dworkin's "right-wing women" (1983), a woman who would work hard to insure that Peter stayed caught and continued to support her and their children. And, perhaps to keep him caught, might she take up the judge's suggestion to create a "lovely home"? Might she begin acting as one of Marabel Morgan's "total women" (1975), meeting Peter at the door wrapped in a sarong, if not saran wrap—offering him betel nut, if not martinis? And, in either scenario, might there be playing as background music Tammy Wynette's 1968 song "Stand by Your Man," with its steadfast yearnings? Maybe not; but certainly one would not expect a reenactment of the American standard "Frankie and Johnny." Neither Angela nor Elizabeth—nor, for that matter, Elí or Nenita—would likely actually kill her man because he "done her wrong." After all, each of these PNG and Puerto Rican women was largely dependent on a wage-earning man for essential income (and, in the case of Angela and Elizabeth, shelter).

In effect, in the context of agro-industrial RSL, Angela and Elizabeth were performing versions of its modernist nuclear family-centered ideal. Yet it is also important to note that the "Angela and Elizabeth and Peter Show" had Papua New Guinean cultural inflections throughout. Both Angela and Elizabeth were using the performative styles found throughout PNG—styles that they may well have learned in their home villages. Women, as we have ourselves witnessed in PNG villages and squatter settlements, often quarrel with each other, sometimes over men, by publicly screaming invectives that are frequently of a sexual nature. Such invectives may be accompanied by insulting physical gestures such as mock mooning. As such (to return to Mintz's ethnographic focus), their performances would not likely float in the Caribbean. Certainly, such performances would not convey the elite "respectability" that Wilson (1969)—read through Butler—argues many Caribbean women may strive for.¹¹

The "show" had, as well, inflections drawn from the nature of the modernity Angela, Elizabeth, and Peter were encountering at RSL. This modernity is less harsh than that of Barrio Jauca. The workers at RSL are not—at this stage of their lives—a rural proletariat. If things did not pan out at RSL they would be disappointed, but they would neither perish nor be plunged into abject and permanent poverty. Most could—and many probably would, albeit with regret—return to home villages where land is still collectively held and available for subsistence agriculture. Moreover, modernity at RSL is often downright exciting, certainly for newcomers. As we have said, there are strictures, but also seductions. Along with the routines of industrial labor there is also novelty: new things to see; new people to meet; new items to look at and, perhaps, buy; new ways of acting. Thus, modernity at RSL not only constrains, it enlivens.

And as a relatively late-arriving modernity, it challenges. As Miller writes concerning the transition from "tradition" to "modernity," this challenge carries with it a sense of precariousness that demands improvisation in the forging of new identities.¹² It encourages inspired performativity, perhaps especially among women (although here we are speculating) who, while "under the legs of men," have relatively few cultural scripts available to them.

Finally, modernity in PNG is understood and appreciated primarily in terms of the possibilities of consumption.¹³ And consumption in PNG is enacted, is displayed. (Interestingly, this was beginning to be the case in the Barrio in 1956 when Mintz returned to find that Taso's son, Lalo, had built a new house with the wages he was earning in New Jersey, a house filled with furniture and other products Lalo wanted for his own.) In-

deed, being an efficacious, modern person in PNG is to be admired, if not envied, for performing a coveted lifestyle—a lifestyle that for the likes of Angela and Elizabeth, as well as Peter, is focused around material possessions such as a TV, refrigerator, and sewing machine.

All of these factors, we think, contributed to Angela's and Elizabeth's almost exuberant theatricality. Serious stuff was at stake, but they were having a great time: they were not only in contention with each other, they were also able to present themselves to a wide audience as contenders.

CONCLUSION

In describing the ways Elí, Nenita, Angela, and Elizabeth contended with and within their differently phased and localized agro-industrial modernities, we have taken seriously Mintz's comparative project. Although, in an essay of this length, we have only been able to explore a few global interconnections (which are, we might mention, thoroughly documented in our 2004 book about RSL), we have, we trust, given some voice to additional others—women—who might have been otherwise unheard.

What remains for us to do is to revisit the anthropological appraisal of the familiar and the strange, the burned-over and the exotic. Significantly, contemporary valuations of the anthropological relevance of the Caribbean/Puerto Rico and Melanesia/PNG have flipped. Mintz finds it ironic that an area once viewed as uninteresting because of its culturally intermediate and indeterminate nature—its neither-here-nor-there mixtures—is “proving to be increasingly popular as a source of terminology, and even of some theoretical ideas, in recent decades” (1996: 300) to those interested in globalization theory. (In particular, he argues that the terms “transculturation” and “creolization,” so frequently in use today, derive from an early Caribbean literature.) Comparably, we find it ironic that an area once viewed as the *sine qua non* for the analysis of cultural difference because of its numerous and distinctive indigenous peoples is now out of favor. Melanesia/PNG is out of favor partly because it is viewed as the site of an anachronistic anthropology that dehistoricizes, that essentializes: an anthropology that does not engage with (indeed, ignores) global interconnections. (As such, Melanesian-focused anthropology also fills the politically incorrect, ethnographic “savage slot” in the discipline of anthropology—a discipline itself seen within the academy as holding this slot [Trouillot 1991].) And it is out of favor, as well, because it is viewed as, at best, peripheral to the global flows that are of contemporary interest—and, therefore, as contributing nothing especially important when

Melanesianists do try to engage, historicize, and interconnect.¹⁴ This is to say, Melanesia, while once both the exotic and the remote, has become merely the remote.

But what more might we say about this situation in which regional valences have flipped such that our area's “loss” appears to have been another area's “gain”? We are, in fact, sympathetic to those who challenge the anthropologists who still use the “ethnographic present” (a virtual past perfect construction) in depicting a contemporary Melanesian world in which local people engage with voracious and devastating mining and logging companies—and a world in which RSL has to contend for its survival with the powerful likes of the World Trade Organization, World Bank, and Coca-Cola Amatil. We are less sympathetic to those who relegate this region to the largely irrelevant. Indeed, it is our claim—one we argued some time ago (Gewertz and Errington 1997) and tried to illustrate in this essay—that it is the strikingly intense ways in which Melanesians are like the rest of us that is particularly informative. In part because change in Melanesia has been so rapid,¹⁵ anthropologists working there are able to see remarkably clearly the nature of social processes. These are characterized, as they are elsewhere, by individual and collective attempts (by both men and women) to maintain, amplify, and extend (in culturally salient but not fixed terms) plausibility and efficacy within changing and frequently politically unequal contexts. That these contexts are also often characterized by inequalities allows—indeed, compels—these anthropologists to refine a more historically informed systemic perspective—one we think Mintz would applaud—about how social processes are both generated and constrained within local as well as broader systems.¹⁶

We are also sympathetic to those finding that a return to a Caribbean focus is long overdue. However, we worry that those global theorists, newly enamored with the Caribbean, may be borrowing terms and ideas without real recognition of their sources in historical process. In this regard, consider an aspect of Jonathan Friedman's distinction between global systems theory and globalization theory:

The current interest in globalized objects and the identification of other people's identities as creole and/or hybrid exemplifies this linkage between superficiality and globality. When I have questioned whether or not the subjects described as creole or hybrid actually experience themselves in such terms . . . I am usually told that this is a question of objective culture and not of experience. That is, global cultural products are like texts that already contain their meaning

before the reader engages them. . . . No need to ask, to engage the other, certainly not to participate as in participant observation. One need only participate to the degree that it avails one a good spectator seat, i.e., a good place from which to observe. (Friedman 2000: 642)

Such a flawed anthropology derives from taking terms out of context and ignores the vision Mintz adopts and adapts from Alfred Kroeber: that the "one proper foundation of all broader studies in ethnology as in history is the precise, intimate, long-continued examination of the culture of an area or period" (Kroeber 1946: 9, quoted in Mintz 1996: 292).¹⁷ Context is not, of course, provided through atemporal—essentialized—representation of one of the many "cultures" that formerly constituted Melanesia's special significance. Context is provided by history as it happens—as, for instance, people variously grapple with forms of agro-industrial modernity: as, for instance, women in PNG and Puerto Rico variously consolidate gains and take advantage of opportunities under changing and challenging circumstances. Correspondingly, without attention to such context, anthropological theories become thin and unconvincing, lacking both sweetness and power. And, it is, of course, attention to such context that Mintz has so carefully paid and conveyed in all of his work about the Caribbean. It is thus a double irony to realize not only that Melanesia and the Caribbean have switched places, but that they have switched places for the wrong reasons.

NOTES

1. Raymond Smith, following Goffman, describes the sugar plantation as a total institution, as "a peculiar kind of instrument for the re-socialization of those who fell within its sphere of influence" (1967: 232). Of course, the degree to which plantations have operated as total institutions varied with the amount of time employees spent on them. Certainly in the Papua New Guinea circumstance we know best, many employees worked and lived on the plantation year round. Others were only hired on a seasonal basis.

2. As of 1886, the northern half of what became PNG was a colony of Germany and the southern half was a colony of Britain. In 1921, after World War I, the northern half—New Guinea—came under Australian administration, first as a League of Nations Mandated Territory, and later as a United Nations Trust Territory. In 1906, the southern half—Papua—though still formally controlled by Britain, also came under Australian administration. The two territories—New Guinea and Papua—were separately administered by Australia until 1942. Subsequently, Australia brought both under a single administration (although the United Nations retained some responsibility for the New Guinea portion). This condition prevailed until PNG's independence as a single nation in 1975.

3. For a social history of RSL, see Errington and Gewertz, 2004. The description of RSL presented in this chapter is based on research in 2000, 2001, 2004, and 2006.

4. Booker Agricultural International was begun by Jock Campbell, Lord Campbell of Eskan and the most prominent businessman to back the Labour Party through the 1960s and 1970s. He described the development of his commitment to transform labor practices on plantations he inherited in an article in the *New Statesman* entitled "Private Enterprise and Public Morality" (1966). "In 1934 I went out to work for my family's sugar business in British Guiana (now Guyana). The conditions in which past members of my family had pursued profits and made considerable fortunes came as a great shock to me. Conditions of employment were disgraceful; wages were abysmally low; housing was unspeakable; workers were treated with contempt—as chattels. Animals and machinery were, in fact, cared for better than the workers because they cost money to buy and replace. The plantocracy had great power in government: for instance—intent on maximizing profits—they did all they could to prevent the establishment of other industries in order to maintain a surplus of labour. There was bitter opposition to the formation of trade unions. The sugar industry had been founded on slavery, continued on indenture and maintained by exploitation, all in the pursuit of profit" (Campbell 1966: 765).

After the war Campbell decided to make things right. The outcome he sought was not a bitter conflict between business and labor, with each seeking maximum advantage. Rather, it was to strive for "a sensible, pleasant, civilized society" (1966: 766) for everyone.

5. It is widely understood in PNG that the World Bank (from which the country had been borrowing substantially) and the World Trade Organization (of which the country is a member) are strongly suggesting that the Papua New Guinean government reduce the state's presence in the economy through "structural adjustments" and "market liberalization." These adjustments include privatization through the sale of state interests in companies either wholly or partially owned by the state: telegraphs and communications, the postal service, the national airline, and RSL. In addition, this liberalization includes the rapid phasing out of tariff protection for all industries.

6. This is not to say, of course, that all people everywhere prefer the modern to the traditional. Thus, Carol Smith demonstrates that Maya women in Guatemala prefer village life because it provides security and certain kinds of autonomy (1996).

7. PNG is somewhat unusual for the developing world in that many people may simply try out cash-focused modernity with the understanding that they can always return to their subsistence-based villages. This is so because most land in PNG remains traditionally owned: it has not been alienated from kin groups. In contrast, see Davis 2006, for distressing accounts of urban poverty when other circumstances prevail.

8. If Wardlow's data (largely about the Huli of Papua New Guinea) are generalizable, men in PNG view sex with the more or less temporary partners they meet while working in towns as more pleasurable (less focused on reproduction) than with their village wives.

9. We have changed the names of all those concerned in these cases—even though, as suggested later, some might be disappointed that we have done so.

10. Moreover, her performance was successful because she followed what might be viewed as the cardinal rule of any good performance: to know your audience and town.

11. It is also hard to see Eli's performance—her knife attack, for example—as an effort

at respectability. In this regard, see Besson's 1993 critique of the applicability of Wilson's claims to all Caribbean women.

12. As Miller argues, because modernist culture "is knowingly forged with a sense of fragility, [there is] a sense that it could be otherwise and a constant fear that it is otherwise" (1994: 321-22).

13. See our *Emerging Class in Papua New Guinea* for a discussion of the way in which modernist identities and interests in PNG "reflect the capacity to consume rather than the capacity to produce" (Gewertz and Errington 1999: 12).

14. Thus, at one university, when we discussed hybridity, imagined global communities, and transnational capitalism in PNG, an anthropologist—a non-Melanesianist—inquired critically to this effect: "Although PNG has brought us much of importance in anthropology concerning, for example, leadership and economic exchange—from models of egalitarian and stratified redistribution to critiques of formalist economics—the anthropology you're describing could be happening anywhere. What's coming out of Papua New Guinea that's especially instructive?"

15. Thus, middle-aged men in Melanesia often remarked to us that their fathers were born in the "stone age," they, in the "space age," and their children, in the "computer age."

16. The Melanesia Interest Group within the American Anthropological Association defines its "interests to include: societies/cultures of the southwest Pacific; transnational linkages between Melanesian cultures/societies and other societies/cultures; and diasporic communities identified with Melanesia," (<http://mediatedcultures.net/MIG/modules/xfsection/article.php?articleid=1>).

17. Friedman attributes such an anthropology to the creation (as a product of the workings of the contemporary world system) of a class of "hybrid cosmopolitans"—ones who see all global flows as akin to their movement from one international conference to the next (2000: 654 and personal communication).

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