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From self-decoration to self-fashioning

Orientalism as backward progress among the Gebusi of Papua New Guinea



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The study of body art has often laboured under separate labels, some associated with indigenous and what were formerly called 'tribal' societies, and others associated with more ostensibly modern ones. Such polar antinomies are easily shredded by the complexities of ethnographic reality. But as Lévi-Strauss might say, oppositions may still persist or be useful to think through for heuristic purposes – or at least to see how their shredding might be a productive process. Further, it is sometimes the case, as in the material I will present shortly, that such dichotomies are clearly expressed by local people themselves, even if they also then dissemble them in fascinating ways.

As an only heuristic point of departure then, we can note that terms such as 'decoration', 'ritual' and the 'collective construction of selfhood' have often been associated with body art in what used to be called tribal societies. These stand in contrast to terms like 'fashion', 'dressing up', 'individual expression', 'choice' and 'lifestyle' often associated with bodily arts in complex and so-called modern societies. If anthropologists used to favour perspectives that were rule-governed, iconographic, or ritualised for the study of body art in pre-state societies, this contrasts with viewpoints for more complex societies that emphasize individualised aspiration and shifting bodily expression in a world of quickly changing styles and statuses. Georg Simmel (1971 [1904]) emphasized the latter perspective for Western fashion. He argued that changing fashion styles reflect the negotiation of status in a context of modern class mobility. More recently, Tseëlon (1992) has attempted to divide fashion into classical, modern and post-modern phases tied to various

epochs of Western modernity.¹ These are collectively contrasted with bodily art in societies in which status is not based on personal development along yardsticks of modern progress and perpetual change.² This complements views that non-modern body art reflects deeply sedimented if not authentic notions of self and social relations that emerge, for instance, as decorations on the skin.³ A modern view of fashion, by contrast, emphasises body art as a superficial and individualised covering, shifted at will to reflect the inclinations, styles and fortunes of the present moment.⁴ While the first assumes more stable social relations, or at least the attempt to stabilise them, the second reflects if not celebrates the contemporary complexity of what Anthony Giddens (1990 and 1991) calls disembedded social relations.

Though the genealogy of our concepts and the baggage of their legacy in the study of body art can be interesting and important, my present concerns, like those of the Gebusi people I've worked with, race far beyond these constraints (see Knauft 2002a and b; 1996). My present concern is how distinctions that we may be tempted to discard in the dustbin of anthropological history may, as *ideologies*, be adopted, played with, and taken quite seriously by peoples themselves in alternative world areas. This raises a more general problem that anthropology faces today. Anthropologists quite rightly reject simple conceptualizations of development or progress, of modernisation, of individual freedom, of political democratisation, of moral enlightenment, and so on. I agree if not insist that a critical analysis of such concepts is necessary (Knauft 2002c). As ideologies, however, many of these same notions or some refraction of them are quite powerful forces in the non-western world. Nations strive, often with ferocity, to become developed, progressive, or modern in their own sense of these terms. Notions of individual freedom, on the one hand, and those of social and cultural enlightenment, on the other, can be strongly embraced. Though we should certainly not adopt the ideologies of an ostensibly modernising world at face value, neither should we reject the way they have often been ground into very local circumstances.

In the realm of body art, it is now common if not expectable to discover cultural hybridity, a global flow of bodily fashions, creative uses of costuming in a current world, and so on. These portrayals often echo or romanticise the creativity of personal expression and a hopeful modernity-at-large (Appadurai 1996). But it is nonetheless true, as I once heard reported on U.S. National Public Radio, that Avon ladies in canoes up the far reaches of the Amazon sell lipstick, deodorant and make-up to local women at incredibly inflated prices – and make a hefty profit off the local population in the process. Here, the backwardness of the traditional versus the modern body can be ideologically real. The critical edge of decoration under such circumstances resonates with the analysis that researchers such as Timothy Burke makes in his book *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women: Commodification, Consumption, and Cleanliness in Modern Zimbabwe* (1996).



Plate 6.1 *Traditional etiquette: the author snaps fingers in a welcoming line of adult Gebusi men, 1981. (Photo credit: Eileen Knauff)*

Culture, clothing and change among Gebusi

The changing definition of so-called traditional versus modern modes of dress and decoration can be examined in the context of the Gebusi. When I first lived with them in 1980–82, Gebusi were one of the most remote and ‘unacculturated’ groups in Papua New Guinea. Located in the interior lowland rainforest of the country’s expansive Western Province, their population numbered just 450.⁵ At the time, Gebusi actively pursued a host of practices that were classic foci in anthropology: shamanism or spirit mediumship; sorcery beliefs and inquisitions; a high level of violence; ornate ritual dances and costuming; elaborate rites of male initiation and male–female fertility; and male sexual practices in which mid- or late teenage initiands manipulated the penises and orally consumed the semen of other males. First contacted in 1962, Gebusi had twenty years later still not been subject to Christianisation, out-migration, significant cash cropping, land alienation, economic development, taxation, or regular government interference in their affairs. The main impact had been the introduction of steel tools and the pacification of their bellicose neighbours, the Bedamini, by Australian patrol officers during the late 1960s and early 1970s. The Australians departed in 1975 when the new nation of Papua New Guinea obtained independence.

Though Western clothes were highly desired, they were seldom available to Gebusi in 1980–82; those specimens that were occasionally worn were usually in tatters or otherwise in an advanced state of disrepair (see Plate 6.1). Most women showed little embarrassment going bare-breasted either during daily activities or when attending major rituals or feasts. At these latter events, bodily adornment with feathers, body paint and various forest-derived decorations was both elaborate and, as far as could be discerned,



Plate 6.2 *A traditional costumed dancer performs in a village longhouse, 1981. (Photo credit: Eileen Knauff)*

consonant with pre-colonial accoutrements for both men and women. Non-performing visitors and hosts dressed in elaborate but individually variable costumes that included wonderfully diverse arrays of plumage, body painting and other decorations. Ritual dancers were richly clad in costumes that included meticulous and highly standardised arrangements of feathered headdresses, fur, leaves, shell slabs or slivers and body painting, all of which iconised and literally embodied a pantheon of Gebusi spirits (see Plate 6.2).⁶ For initiates, the elaborate decorative elements of their climactic costumes indicated both the apotheosis of their youth and fertility as a spiritual ‘red bird-of-paradise’ and ties of kinship and friendship that bonded them with their initiate sponsors in different Gebusi settlements. The many sponsors of each initiate made and donated specific costume elements that were aesthetically harmonised and integrated with those of others in the initiates’



Plate 6.3 *Union of human and spiritual beauty, 1981: at the final stage of the male initiation, an initiant stands humbly in his completed red bird-of-paradise costume. (Photo credit Eileen Knauft)*

final body decoration. As such, the initiates' final costuming was a corporeal manifestation of social relations and gift-giving across virtually the entire Gebusi social and spiritual landscape (see Plate 6.3).

Upon returning for a six-month restudy in 1998, I discovered that many aspects of Gebusi life had altered substantially (Knauft 2002a and b, 2003, 2005). The community I had lived with had of their own volition relocated from the deep rainforest to the portion of their land that abuts the Nomad Station. This government outpost boasts an airstrip, a score of administrative staff, a school, police office, several churches and a number of small stores.

It also supports a twice-weekly market, sports league contests on a carefully maintained ballfield, and a range of other government and private activities and events.

The Nomad Station is located at the geographic intersection of several ethnic groups and is the primary point of outside influence and inter-ethnic gathering for some 9,000 persons scattered thinly across 3,500 square miles of lowland rainforest. The Gebusi communities I had previously lived with had re-settled a short twenty-minute walk from this administrative and social centre. In the bargain, Gebusi whom I had known and their descendants had become willing participants in Christian churches, the Nomad sports leagues, the Nomad market and government activities. Their children regularly attended the multiethnic Nomad Community School, where they received instruction by national teachers in the Papua New Guinean dialect of English for a full school day five days a week. Eighty-four percent of adults in the new Gebusi community were baptised members in one of the three local Christian churches – Catholic, Evangelical, or Seventh Day Adventist. All of these denominations were highly fundamentalist in orientation. Amid these changes, Gebusi spirit mediumship had become defunct and male spirit séances – which had previously taken place an average of once every eleven days – were no longer held.

With the decline of traditional spirit mediumship and séances, there was little way Gebusi could communicate with their indigenous spirits. With startling rapidity, Gebusi cosmology had been supplanted by a Christian cosmos of good and evil, sanctity and sin, and heaven and hell (see Knauft 2002a:chs. 6–7; 2005:ch. 8). Initiations were no longer held in my community of residence, and a large cohort of young men had not been initiated and never would be. The ritual dances (*gigobra*) that had accompanied feasts had been largely replaced by 'parties' (*fati*) at which string band or disco music was played. Now living in scattered hamlets rather than in a centralised village, Gebusi resided in individual or extended family houses rather than gathering in a main longhouse. Social life was more differentiated and less exuberant than before.

One of the most immediately visible changes in Gebusi social life was the common presence of Western clothes (see Plate 6.4). Though the paltry local cash economy and lack of economic development or wage labour had stymied many Gebusi material aspirations, enterprising government officials and their affiliates occasionally managed to have cheap bales of Chinese or used Australian shirts and blouses, dresses and pants flown in to the airstrip at Nomad – where they could be quickly and completely sold for a profit even at relatively low prices. As a result, though many aspects of Gebusi economy had not altered significantly, most villagers possessed at least one set of Western clothes for wearing in the village and another set, cleaner and less spotted or torn, for wearing at village feasts or 'parties', at Church and when visiting the Nomad Station. Women invariably wore blouses or dresses – to be seen bare-breasted was highly shameful, even in the village – and men always wore shirts when in church or while visiting the Nomad Station. Traditional female dress of woven grass skirts and male dress of fibre-stripped 'ass-grass'



Plate 6.4 *Local parishioners and the author pose for the camera outside the Nomad Catholic church, 1998. (Photo credit: Bruce Knaft, self-timed)*

and loincloths were rarely if ever seen either in daily or ceremonial contexts in the community.

Gebusi practices and attitudes concerning traditional body decoration and dancing were particularly noteworthy (Knaft 2002b). Though the costuming of ritual dancers and initiates had become moribund in most villages – along with the demise of the ceremonies themselves – Gebusi re-staged these processions in full costuming as a kind of folkloric re-enactment for public and multi-ethnic display at the Nomad Station. This was especially the case during the week that surrounded Papua New Guinea National Independence Day on September 16. During this period, the various ethnic groups of the Nomad Sub-District visited and performed in their respective traditional costumes for a collected throng of visitors and government officers on the parade grounds of the government station (see Plate 6.5). These performances were judged by officials, who awarded nominal amounts of prize money to the persons and groups they had rated most highly (see Plate 6.6).

The re-enactment of traditional display was not only for official viewing. Highly talked about and avidly planned for, the folkloric performance of local dances and costuming during the week of Independence Day became an intense focus of community excitement and planning in most villages. The performances were avidly viewed by more than one thousand people, who came from near and far to see the re-display of traditional costumes and dances. In most cases, the performances were undertaken by villagers who



Plate 6.5 *A man and woman in neo-traditional costume introduce their village dances on Independence Day, 1998. The T-shirt of the man standing in the middle reads, 'Compulsive, Antisocial, Manic Depressive, Paranoid, but Basically Happy.' (Photo credit: Bruce Knaft)*

no longer decorated themselves or danced in similar manner in their own villages. Adding to the general splendour of their portrayals, some villages dressed up whole lines of males and females in initiation or traditional dance costumes despite the fact that performers would in all likelihood never be initiated or dance in their own villages (see Plate 6.7). Costume elements were borrowed or lent in ad hoc fashion and typically did not reflect gift-giving, food reciprocity, or enduring ties of ceremonial or spiritual sponsorship that accompanied traditional dances and initiations.



Plate 6.6 *An official wearing a Michael Jackson T-shirt judges a Gebusi dancer during the traditional costume competition at Nomad on Independence Day, 1998. (Photo credit: Bruce Knauft)*

Performers in many cases had little ritual or initiatory identification with the costuming and display they were enacting. Their attitudes concerning the meanings and beliefs associated with these practices were revealed in an elaborate series of 'dramas' (*dramas*) that were performed at Nomad at night during the week of Independence. In these portrayals, performers dressed in intricate indigenous costumes put on skits that re-enacted traditional social practices and the spiritual or mythical beliefs with which they had been associated. In tone and expression, these portrayals were not appreciative; rather, they were consistently farcical, buffoonish and parodic. In skit after skit, old costumes, beliefs and ceremonies were served up by villagers in



Plate 6.7 *A line of costumed young men pose in initiation costumes at the traditional competition at Nomad on Independence Day, 1998. In some of these displays, performers donned costumes that had traditionally been worn sequentially at different stages of the initiation, and included boys too young to be initiated. (Photo credit: Bruce Knauft)*

elaborate decorative presentation as ignorant and backward indicators of unenlightened beliefs and practices – to the great enjoyment of the assembled villages from near and far (see Plate 6.8). The exaggerated parody of traditional practices was finely tuned with physical antics, slapstick humour and biting irony that brought roars of appreciative and heartfelt laughter from the large inter-ethnic audience. Among the beliefs and practices made fun of were



Plate 6.8 *Gebusi performers in mock traditional costume present themselves to the evening crowd before performing a drama skit of old-time customs at the Nomad Independence celebrations, 1998. (Photo credit: Bruce Knaft)*

the difficulty of chopping trees with traditional stone axes; the 'stupidity' of believing in magical spells and rites; spiritual beliefs concerning physical affliction and curing; inquests for sorcery; taboos and beliefs that surrounded fish poisoning; practices of traditional fighting; and indigenous myths and creation stories.

These spoofs were in most cases accompanied by an explanation by one of the lead performers, delivered through a battery-operated bullhorn, that

described in English or in the national lingua franca of *tok pisin* the 'ignorant' traditional practice or belief that was being enacted. The portrayal of traditions was thrown into relief and punctuated by other performances that were staged as Christian morality tales, which were typically accompanied by posters or placards graced with corresponding verses from the Bible. In these skits, those who followed heathen customs invariably became depraved or were struck down while those who followed the dictates of enlightened Christian morality were saved and rewarded.

The general cast of Gebusi 'dramas' can be fleshed out by a few examples. In one common skit, a man in black paint, dark cassowary headdress and wearing an old loincloth groaned buffoonishly as he tried with clumsy and exaggerated effort to hack down a tiny tree by using a traditional stone axe. Every few swings, the stone would fall from the handle and the man would grunt and stumble stupidly while looking for it in the grass. Trying to sharpen the stone proved irritating and ultimately futile. This led to a dispute with an ostensible comrade, who smoked local tobacco from a traditional pipe and refused to help – until the two almost came to blows. The pantomime was enacted with slapstick comedy and rudeness that proved quite funny to the audience.

In another skit, traditional fish poisoning beliefs were lampooned. As I had witnessed in 1980–82, indigenous beliefs led Gebusi to festoon a traditional dancer in full finery so he could conduct a stately dance on the river bank while derris root fish poison was leached into the river. His beauty was thought to woo the fish to the surface and to stun them with his magnificent aura – magnifying the effect of the poison so men could scoop up large numbers of fish into net bags or into their canoes before the effects of the toxin wore off and the fish swam away. In the skit, these beliefs became farcical: men who played 'fish' in the skit snapped at the dancer and scared him so much that he drummed in a frenzy and pranced about wildly – just the opposite of the dignified dance step that was traditionally practiced. The dancer in his awkwardness and uncertainty veered so close to a nearby cooking fire that the extra-long palm leaves at the rear of his costume caught fire. After trying with mock fear to extinguish his own burning tail, the dancer raced in mock terror from the performance area – to the howls of the audience.

For me, the most dramatic skit was a parody of traditional sorcery divination and inquest practices that was performed by some of my close Gebusi friends. The opening performer portrayed a 'sick man'; he was caked in mud and had a huge fake phallus strapped to his waist. He moaned stupidly that he was going to die, to which the 'spirit medium' in the skit responded by yelling loudly directly in his ear, that is, 'to keep his spirit from leaving'. After the man 'died', the spirit medium and his associates sang raucously to contact the spirits for 'guidance'. Eventually, they grabbed a villager and accused him of causing the death through sorcery. In a mock corpse inquest, the sorcery suspect was forced to wail at the corpse of the deceased. (This is a practice I saw practiced very much for real in 1980–82.) At this, the corpse in the skit arched its back and a string was surreptitiously pulled to raise his make-believe phallus high into a large erection. Audience members doubled

up with laughter. This 'sign' indicated that the sorcery suspect was guilty. As the suspect was tied up, he whimpered and cried like a baby. He was then intimidated, beaten and eventually 'killed' in buffoonish manner by another man in the skit. Finally, the friends of the murdered man came and, in a farcical battle, 'fought' those who had killed him. The message of the skit was clear: 'in the past we actually thought people could die from sorcery. We followed false beliefs that led us to fight and kill each other for nothing'.

Against such portrayals were enactments of first contact, which featured the proud and disciplined actions of Australian patrol officers – played by villagers. In several of the skits, the officers brandished 'guns' and brought order and peace to villagers, who were portrayed as scared, awkward and prone to needless fighting. One of the favourite skits was of a traditional man who had been given a first tin of fish and bag of rice by a benevolent Australian patrol officer. Uncomprehending, the villager tried to open the can of fish by biting it and then smashing it on a rock. He then built a large bonfire to cook this important but still unopened food. Along with the pulverised tin, he put the unopened bag of rice into a plastic bucket, which he put directly on the fire. The entire assemblage promptly erupted into a ball of flame. The audience convulsed in laughter as the man raced off in mock horror, ending the skit.

Of the forty-two dramas presented, twenty-three were farcical parodies of traditional customs, five were stories of colonial first contact, five were Christian morality tales, four were about modern life, three were song or dance performances, one was a physical drama (men and boys in traditional costume played a game of bounding leapfrog around the performance area) and one was a unique hybrid.

Orientalism revisited

The re-enactment of traditions by Gebusi and other ethnic groups at Nomad – first in decontextualised display during the day and then in parody at night – reflect the notion that indigenous costuming should distance historical meanings, identifications and indigenous forms of social transaction from the present. When indigenous costuming is worn, as the Christian pastors emphasize, it is said that true intentions reside not on the skin but in the innermost heart of the wearer – whether he or she is truly dedicated to God.⁷ Under contemporary circumstances, the moral condition of the self is no longer reflected externally; what you see is not necessarily what you will get (cf. O'Hanlon 1995a: 832; 1995b).

Particularly in their 'dramas', Gebusi use of indigenous costuming tends toward what we might call auto-orientalism or self-orientalism, that is, the stigmatised self-attribution of alterity. This notion can be put in larger context by distinguishing auto-orientalism from other species of the genre. In bodily art, we can define orientalism in general as the construction and projection of stigmatised Otherness through the cultural assertion of 'progress' versus 'backwardness' in body decoration and sartorial style. Orientalism in this sense is the visually embodied projection of alterity as stigma across the divide of an imagined rupture of social and moral advancement vis-à-vis the past.

Probably the most generic variety of orientalism, reflected in Edward Said's famous book (1994), is what we might call 'projective' orientalism. This is the outward projection of stigmatised backwardness onto others. By negative contrast, such attributions distinguish and highlight the projecting subject's own superiority and progress.⁸

In contemporary circumstances, orientalist projections across a time-line of supposed progress have several different permutations.⁹ In some cases one finds a displacement of orientalisating stigma to a sub-population within one's larger group. Here the stigma of being insufficiently modern is displaced from the majority and re-projected onto a minority. This might be termed *internal orientalism* or *sub-orientalism*. In body art, this process is dramatically documented by Louisa Schein (2000) in her book on the cultural politics of the Miao (Hmong) ethnic minority in China. The Miao are just one of many 'primitivised' ethnic groups that provide the alter to dominant Han identity in China; their elaborate traditional costumes and drinking generosity are taken as pre-dynastic relics of Chinese tradition.¹⁰ The costumed folklore of so-designated backward ethnic minorities is large in China, both as foil for national definition and for endo-tourism. Such patterns are common in the nostalgic primitivising of marginal ethnic groups and their elaborate costuming within the larger hegemony of a national imaginary. Such features of backward and yet beautiful ethnicity paraded for the national or international gaze are also marked among Kalasha of north-western Pakistan (Maggi 2001), the Mayan peoples of Guatemala (Nelson 1999) and native American displays in parts of North and South America.

Insofar as it gains media attention and political symbolism, however, internal orientalism is a double-edged sword that can be taken up by performers themselves. As several anthropologists have noted, the self-proclamation of bodily alterity can provide in-your-face resistance to outside standards of progress as moral worth. This is what might be dubbed *counter-orientalism*: the re-appropriation of orientalisating images to aggressively assert rather than disparage local styles of clothing and costuming. A poignant example here is Beth Conklin's (1997) trenchant analysis of bodily display in the politics and mass media of Brazilian Indian land and cultural rights.

When Kayapo leader Kube-i arrived at the courthouse to give his deposition, he appeared shirtless, wearing body paint and feathers – for which he was promptly charged with contempt of court. (Conklin 1997:720)

When ordered to show respect by wearing a suit and tie, he replied,

Your Honor, this is how we Kayapo show respect. This is the Indian's suit and tie.' Besides, he pointed out, 'When we invite you to our village, we don't ask you to take off your clothes and paint up like a Kayapo. (ibid.)

Beyond the Amazon, one can note aspects of counter-orientalism in the increased practice of veiling among educated middle and upper class Islamic women in the mid-East and south-east Asia, including some who were erstwhile feminists. Their point, among others, is that they can re-

appropriate the erstwhile stigmatising signs of gendered backwardness to demonstrate their equality if not superiority to ostensibly modern sartorial alternatives. One may note a similar theme in the counter-clothing styles of African leaders during the 1980s, when the wearing of Kente cloth was used to assert African sartorial equality, but on their own terms.

Insofar as its value derives from opposition and resistance, however, counter-orientalism flirts with the same oppositions it tries to overcome. In attempting to reverse the terms of stigma, its axes of division can be accepted if not reinforced (see critique by Chakrabarty 2000). Against the standards of so-called modern progress, then, counter-orientalism almost invariably borrows from the essentialism it is trying to reject (this is a point Said himself emphasised in his 'Afterword' to the 1994 edition of *Orientalism*). In terms of body art and sartorial style, counter-orientalism does not return to indigenous styles of clothing or decoration. Rather, it essentialises and reinvents these in ways that are neo-traditional and ethnically modern.¹¹ This trend dovetails with what Frederick Errington and Deborah Gewertz (2001) call the generification of culture. Conklin's analysis illustrates this generification quite well: certain forms of so-called indigenous decoration are downplayed while others are highlighted and made indigenously generic if not mandatory for political and media consumption. Traditional culture is at once embodied and made iconic as a neo-traditional style of dress and bodily display.¹²

Insofar as counter-orientalist initiatives adopt received lines of group-other opposition (even as they attempt to reverse these) they carry the potential and the threat of reproducing or re-inscribing stigma. This result is highly evident and carried to a self-conscious extreme among Gebusi. Their performative dramas of the past reflect auto-orientalism, that is, the self-projection of stigmatised alterity along a time-line of progress. This disparagement of social and sartorial history is also evident in some other parts of Melanesia. For instance, Errington and Gewertz (1995) describe how Karavar of Manus Province debunk their 'primitive' past in skits that celebrate the arrival of the first white missionary. As among Gebusi, portrayals of indigenous backwardness are contrasted with those of becoming literally enlightened through social and moral progress.

If self-orientalist portrayals are highly evident in historical enactments by peoples such as Gebusi and Karavar, they easily arise as sub-plots in the other types of orientalism mentioned above. In counter-orientalist resistance against stigma, for instance, there often remains suspicion or fear among those resisting that they are, in fact, more backward and undeveloped than they would like to admit. Subverting or denying this stigma is often related to the threat or the reality that it has, in fact, already been internalised. In this respect, groups like Gebusi and Karavar show in a less filtered manner the deeper fears that are common in internal and counter-orientalist initiatives.

Gendered markers?

My final points are more speculative and concern the gendered significance of ethnic-cum-orientalist marking. Though the marking of ethnicity in daily dress may not be explicit for groups as wholes, it often seems to be relatively

more pronounced for women than for men. Particularly in Asia, the mid-East and Central America, it is common for women to bear the sartorial marking of ethnicity and/or historical authenticity. For disenfranchised ethnic groups and also for mainstream ones fighting Western stigma, it is often women rather than men who bear the greatest signs of modern alterity in their quotidian appearance. Whether it is an Islamic veil, an Indian sari, a Mayan traje, Kalasha beads, a Miao headdress, or heavy traditional jewellery, women are often icons of contemporary ethnic tradition.¹³ These gendered markings are often associated with women's upholding of neo-traditional domestic morality and sexual propriety. While men may also be ethnically marked as Others, they are often at greater liberty, both socially and sartorially, to shift their styles and pass unmarked into more fully modern roles in their daily activities. Insofar as this is true, orientalism can be both displaced and internalised onto a domesticated and neo-traditionalised female sphere. As evident among Gebusi but also more widely, the contextual display of neo-tradition does not prevent someone – but particularly a man – from being superficially costumed in one way at one moment and another the next. Among the Huli of the Southern Highlands, Holly Wardlow (2002), describes how men may wear the famous Huli wig one day only to trade it off for a cowboy hat the next, depending on personal whim. By contrast, Huli women are strongly constrained from wearing Western accoutrements or even from wearing shoes, lest they be seen as sexually loose and immoral. In such cases, the masculine appropriation of contextual neo-tradition as well as modern sartorial style can itself index personal self-fashioning, that is, the notion that modern self-fashioning and the liberties that it entails are masculine prerogatives (cf. Knauf 1999b). From this perspective, the double standard whereby men can disembody and reembody themselves into neo-tradition more flexibly than women is consistent with sexual double standards that are frequently indexed by corresponding differences in modern and neo-traditional sartorial marking.

Lastly and on a yet larger scale, it can be noted that the shift from so-called decoration to so-called fashion has its own gendered component. Though the global fashion industry certainly includes clothing for men, *haute couture* is overwhelmingly objectified on and in the context of the young female body. This may be one reason why the masculine tribal chic rarely exceeds a national boundary even though the masculine dimension of indigenous costuming has been historically prominent if not pre-eminent in world areas such as Melanesia (e.g., Strathern and Strathern 1971; Kirk 1981; O'Hanlon 1989).

Consonant with these general trends, indigenous patterns of Gebusi costuming may be at once a dying breed and an apt commentary on larger patterns – the owl of Minerva in the heart of modern clothing.

NOTES

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- 1 See Entwistle 2000:43–8.
- 2 See Blumer 1968 and 1995; Sellerberg 2001; Entwistle 2000; contrast Brydon and Niessen 1998; cf., Greenblatt's (1980) analysis of self-fashioning as an emergent form of modern subjectivity during the European Renaissance.
- 3 E.g., Strathern and Strathern 1971; M. Strathern 1979; Turner 1980; O'Hanlon 1989; Knauf 1999a; Johnson 2001.
- 4 E.g. the journal *Fashion Theory* and books on fashion published by Berg Press.
- 5 Concerning Gebusi in 1980–82, see Knauf 1985a and b, 1986, 1987a and b, 1989a and b, 1996: ch.6; 2002a, 2005a:chs 1–6.
- 6 Concerning indigenous Gebusi costuming, see Knauf 1989b; 1999a:78–80 and photos 1–12, 14 therein; see also Knauf 1985b:257–60.
- 7 It is for this very reason that the evangelical pastor disparaged costume elements such as the red bird-of-paradise – not because he found them ugly, but because they confused a glossy surface appearance with an inner individual state.
- 8 For sake of argument, it may be asserted that orientalism in general and projective orientalism in particular are distinctively modern forms of ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism in general does not require a sense of being modern or a time-line of progress to effect stigma. When in early colonial Papua New Guinea the Etoro peoples disparaged the Kaluli as disgusting because they inseminated their initiates anally rather than orally; when the Kaluli returned the slur; and when the Onabasulu thought that both groups were depraved by forcing semen into the body of initiates rather than coating it on their skin (see Kelly 1977:chapter 1), they were all being ethnocentric but not orientalist. Their mutual disparagement was based on what Theodore Schwartz (1975) called ethnic totemism; it did not draw on notions of historical development based on collective and individual progress. That is, assertions of being 'better' did not in these cases depend on a sense of having 'gone ahead' or having 'become more developed' over time.
- 9 I thank Carla Jones (pers. comm.) for her insights concerning orientalism – though she bears no responsibility for the coarseness of my own distinctions. Jones and Ann Marie Leshkovich have recently elaborated a nuanced notion of self-orientalism in the context of contemporary Asian fashion (Leshkovich and Jones 2003).
- 10 The projection of Otherness has strongly affected Miao themselves, many of whom displace this ethnic attribution onto others who they claim to be yet more 'authentic' Miao – and hence more distant, remote and 'backward' – than themselves. More diffusely reckoned, however, Miao are typically considered to be China's largest ethnic minority.
- 11 Strictly speaking, this is not the invention of tradition as much as it is the re-appropriation and re-definition of tradition as a self-conscious and more generic form of bodily presentation in the explicit context of modern cultural politics.
- 12 Over time, this process can become recursive: ethnic or tribal styles find their way into wider fields of representation and even into fields of national or international fashion. Conversely, local couture may assert self-representation in ever more ethnic-modern guises. In the fashion world, one sees this tendency in the production of 'ethnic chic', for instance, the selective appropriation of Banana Republic ethnicity as a marker of *haute couture*. Middle Eastern veils, Rastafarian dreadlocks, Indian saris, tribalising feathers and beads – all are fair game in the hunt for next season's newer-than-new fashion line-up. In their book *Re-orienting Fashion*, Niessen, Leshkovich and Jones (2003) analyze how east and south-east Asian clothing designers are both complicit and subversive in this process, that is, they strive to reassert the difference and distinctiveness of Asian styles of dress while linking these with symbolic and commercial success in a wider world of fashion (see also Kondo 1997). In the process, sartorial identity is inextricably intertwined with rather than resistant to the market-driven terms of capitalist production, distribution, advertising and consumption.
- 13 Counterexamples could also be noted, including the wearing of turbans by Sikh men and highly distinctive hairstyles and black hats worn by Jewish men.

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