
“We Will Make a Man Out of You”: Taro “Brands” and Initiation “Styles” on the Rai Coast of Papua New Guinea

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INTRODUCTION

A brand that is not distinguishable is not a brand at all. But how is singularity achieved and maintained? What is the power that achieving an identity demonstrates? And how is this related to the item that is branded? This Article asks these questions of specific material from Melanesia, material in which distinctiveness, identity conditions, and authenticity are central. I start, though, with a vignette that was not, in fact, the reason for undertaking the analysis that

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follows (the experience came after), but that points to the commentary in the paper on the practice of branding.

During research with a contemporary dance company in Frankfurt, I heard about the problem they were having with branding. The choreographer (William Forsythe) is not only famous for his extraordinary choreography, but also famous for constantly making and adapting work. No work is set. He is present at every performance of his company, running the lighting and effects in real time, sending signals to the performers about the duration and content of scenes. Not only that, pieces evolve — they change in response to audience reaction. He “reads” the audience and responds as they provide feedback.

Those that promote and fund the Forsythe Company realize that they have the possibility for a valuable brand. “Everyone wants brand Forsythe,” the company is told by marketers. These marketers would like to scale up, as it were, the number of people who can experience a Forsythe performance. This is where the problem arises because scaling up actually means eliminating the changing nature of each performance. Forsythe’s practice of running every show is an inconvenience. It means that each shows requires his input of time and energy. Shows cannot be multiplied as he cannot be in two places at once, and they require intimate, small venues with limited audience numbers to allow him to respond to those audiences. Transformation and response to others are not easily accommodated as part of the brand. To “brand” Forsythe, then, is to make a clear and replicable identity. But, for the company, uncertainties and transformations are what give the performances *authenticity*, and thus provide the *recognition conditions* of the Forsythe Company itself. It is part of the distinctive value of what they do.

I present this aspect of branding that fixes essences *as if* they could be divorced from the practices that generate them, as a contrast to the way styles come to have value in the economic and social systems of various peoples from Melanesia. As we will see, just as with the Forsythe Company, value requires an extension of the original, not a replication of form. In fact, replication is transformation. From this examination we will return to a discussion of the way brands (such as the one marketers would like to develop for the Forsythe Company) stabilize image and identity in a value creation process with particular colonizing and controlling mechanisms.¹ These mechanisms separate image from product, positing an essential quality to the brand itself. I

¹ See discussion *infra* Part III (analyzing the importance of origin, transformation, and value-creation in producing distinctive taro “brands” and initiation styles).

will make clear through my discussion that there are existent alternatives to distinction through identification with an essential nature (i.e., branding). The indigenous notion of “style” offers us something different as a place to start while attending to identity conditions and authenticity.

I. TARO TUBERS AND MYTHS OF TRANSFORMATION ON THE NORTH COAST OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA²

Amidst the many interesting things said by people in Reite, a village in the mountains that border the Rai Coast of Papua New Guinea, is a striking story about recognition and authenticity. A story in which assumptions and common sense understandings that we may have are set at an interesting angle, tangential to but nevertheless potentially illuminating in comparison. It relates to one of the most important elements of life there, the staple starchy tuber, “taro” (*Colocasia esculenta* var. *antiquorum*), an element not just of daily diet during the happy months of its harvest, but also of key origin stories, of garden formation and artistry, and of reproductive exchange.

Reite people say that the kind, the variety of a taro plant changes depending on the location of its planting. Not so striking, you might think, as surely plant varieties change and develop over time, either with or without human breeding and intervention. But in this case, the taro is said to transform from one clearly identified variety to another *in one generation*.

People rely on taro as the staple of their subsistence economy. As an aspect of this centrality, indistinguishable from taro’s function of sustaining bodies, taro gardening provides form and structure to people’s activities, to their interactions, and to the very landscape in which it has played a major part. Taro reveals a human world, redolent with the presence of others, of an unfolding history of kinship and generation. Taro varieties are owned. They are indicators of particular places. Taro gardens are works of art, with intricate and unique forms of planting in each place.³ Tubers themselves are much

² The analysis in this Article is of data from my own research and interviews with Nekgini and Ngaing speaking people in Papua New Guinea, undertaken since 1993.

³ Cf. BRONISLAW MALINOWSKI, ARGONAUTS OF THE WESTERN PACIFIC 58-59 (E.P. Dutton & Co. 2d ed. 1932) (1922) (discussing the Trobriand people’s detailed ornamentation and workmanship in gardening); 2 BRONISLAW MALINOWSKI, CORAL GARDENS AND THEIR MAGIC: A STUDY OF THE METHODS OF TILLING THE SOIL AND OF AGRICULTURAL RITES IN THE TROBRIAND ISLANDS, reprinted in 8 MALINOWSKI COLLECTED WORKS 1, 88, 98, 104-07 (Raymond Firth ed., Routledge 2002) (1935) (detailing the terminology and symbolism used by Trobriand Islanders for certain crops, including

prized for their weight, their solidity, their texture, color, shape, and savor. People recognize a vast variety of indigenous taro. In a small garden near his house, the (now sadly deceased) old man Urangari once pointed out to me more than twenty kinds.⁴

But the mystery of transmutation remains. Is it possible in one generation for taro to change from one variety to another? Or perhaps we ought to be asking the more ecological question: what is happening between and among plants, persons, and places to make the observation of transformation from one form to another not only plausible, but asserted time and again by these expert taro gardeners?

The story of transformation is told as an important adjunct to the story of taro and its origin itself. I should say a word about myths before I embark on that part of my exposition. Myths are a genre of stories (“ancestor stories”) that talk of the origin or first use of all the important elements in Reite people’s everyday lives. These stories come under the native language term “patuki.” Patuki are the narratives of the doings of certain ancestors and spirit precursors. They are also the *characters* themselves. Thus the patuki for the origin of taro is the taro deity. The particularity of the story and of the character are one. Patuki is also the term used to mean “talk together and reach a realization.” It is a way of saying “knowledge” or “understanding.” What the taro patuki does as narrative, character, and knowledge is demonstrate the procedures and conditions under which taro tubers grow. The narrative contains the all-important name of the deity, a name that is sung in the particular tune that was also revealed by that deity when taro was planted in the ground. The shape and form of the planting, and of the garden more generally, is specified in intricate detail by the taro patuki.

But if I give the impression here that myth is important only because it contains a coded series of instructions, I am not giving the full picture at all. In following the taro patuki, people indeed follow a specific way of growing taro, but they also position themselves in a series of relations to others. What I wish to convey here is the concrete nature of myth. Specifically, it is the mode through which people differentiate themselves from other people by following particular procedures. People who live through particular patuki are different

the taro, grown in the gardens); Joël Bonnemaïson, *Magic Gardens in Tanna*, PAC. STUD., Dec. 1991, at 71, 72-76 (documenting the role of magicians, magic stones, and certain rituals in traditional magic gardens in Tanna).

⁴ Urangari was the eldest surviving member of the Reite kin group that claimed the origin story of taro, and one of my early guides in understanding the significance of the plant.

from people who live through other patuki. To put it as simply as possible, the difference comes from the different relations that constitute them. What myth does which is concrete is to position persons in relation to other persons, to history, to places, and to particular known powers and capacities in the land. It is these others (persons, landforms, places etc.) and histories that constitute a person's unique form.

Let me expand briefly while continuing to refer to taro and its different varieties. Very early on during my fieldwork on the Rai Coast, I visited a village called Maibang, speakers of a different language than Reite people, but nevertheless closely connected to them through generations of marriage and trade. I sat with an old man called Kundi Pawayin who said Maibang was a collective (colonial) name for several closely related smaller groups, each named after the area of land in which they had established themselves. Kundi was from "Waaping," and I was very fortunate to have come to him as Waaping was the original source of taro for the whole region. He told me of how a woman had come from the west (the direction of Reite and Nekgini speakers). She looked old and decrepit, covered in sores. The hamlets and places she passed before she arrived at Waaping chased her away, shouting abuse at her because of her smell and appearance. But Kundi's ancestors had welcomed her in, offered her the terrible soup made from boiled stones and wild ginger that everyone had to eat in those days (before proper food arrived), and a bed to rest her old body on. During the night, she transformed into a beautiful young woman and gave birth to the first taro tubers anyone there had ever seen. She showed Waaping people how to cook taro, and how to plant its immature corms in the correct manner in the ground. But she would not stay with them, and continued her journey to the east. Her name was Mai'anderi.

My own journey, unbeknownst to me, took me back along the route Mai'anderi had followed. But the taro patuki that I first heard in Reite made no mention of her. It was, in fact, all about a male taro deity; one who was discovered by a Reite man living in a cave beneath the waters of a rushing stream at the place called "Samat Matakaring." This taro patuki gave the first real foods to Reite people, and instructed them in its cooking, planting, and horticulture. Indeed, alongside the tubers and instructions for planting, etc., he also demonstrated that the power for growing tubers in the ground came from his voice. When he sang over the immature corms, they began to grow and take form in the ground. The appearance of taro was then, in fact, also the appearance of the male cult in Reite, an institution whose function is to reproduce, by secret means, the voice of the taro patuki, and thus

generate transformations in taro tubers in the gardens and, as we shall see transformations in other bodies — those of people themselves. Now, “Samat Matakaring patuki,” as it was referred to, centers on a particular strain of taro. That strain, called “kapa” (*pel kapa*), was the original strain given by the patuki in this story. It is still grown today, and in fact is both highly prized as a satisfyingly dense and white starch, and more importantly, kapa is an essential element in the production of Reite taro gardens. It is planted at the very center of the garden and it is kapa that the other plants, procedures, and tunes, names, or songs refer to and “grow.”

So what of Mai'anderi? Well, fascinatingly, Kundi Pawayin told me that she came from the west. And, indeed, when Reite people refer to Samat Matakaring patuki, they make the bold claim that this is *the* origin point of taro in the world. But it turned out that Reite people know about Mai'anderi, as well. It is said in Reite that before taro was generally known, a man went down to the stream near Samat Matakaring to sharpen his stone axe. Coming upon a woman at this place, he was given real food (taro) to eat for the first time and went home that evening with a full belly. He slept well, but as usual, his wife and children could not sleep and sat crying with hunger. But the man hid what he had seen and done, returning each day to eat his fill and return home in the evening to sleep soundly. His wife became suspicious, and one day followed him in secret. When she saw the woman and smelt the food, she became jealous and angry. Rushing forward she seized her husband's stone axe. But the taro woman said, “Hold on a moment,” and parted the hair on her crown, indicating where the wife was to strike her. Her head was split by the axe blow, and through the opening, the taro woman packed taro tubers and immature corms. Rising with a full belly of taro, she set off towards the east. Her name was Mai'anderi.

When Reite people plant their taro gardens, they do so in the name of Samat Matakaring. But the final part of their work there is to prepare a bed and a staff for Mai'anderi. Calling her by name, they command or impeach her to return from the places to which she has traveled, bringing with her the taro she carries in her belly. She is asked to settle in the garden and grow her baby taro there. Reite gardens have many varieties of taro grown in them now: kapa is central in every respect, but it is complemented and surrounded by varieties that have come back, as Reite people put it, from other places — places that Mai'anderi visited and supplied, and in which different taro strains developed.

One major descriptive category for taro is gender. There is male and female taro, distinguished by color and shape. So, although it was taro

kapa that was carried by Mai'anderi in her belly, the movement and gestation elsewhere caused its transformation into other forms. Just as kapa is associated with Reite, so these other places have their original strains, and their transformations of those strains.

I think one might reasonably ask if I was extremely fortunate to land, completely by chance, in these two places that are vitally connected by the movements of Mai'anderi at either ends of her journey? Was it just good fortune to come to Kundi Pawayin? Yes and no. Not only does every place have a version of the taro patuki to show how they have a right to grow the tuber, but every place has a different variety, a different color, shape, taste, etc., which they consider their own and that is linked to their particular taro patuki.⁵ Much as I would like to claim credit for arriving in the taro equivalent of a grand cru vineyard in Burgundy, I do not think that would be correct. Indeed, although it is clear that Kundi acknowledged Reite as the origin of Mai'anderi's journey, there was both a kinship reason (“we know where this comes from, we are acknowledged by those others for helping Mai'anderi”), and a counter-claim in him doing so. It was his ancestors, after all, who had elicited taro from her, and Reite people who had chased her away. You may well think that this sounds like a paper about Geographical Indicators rather than brands, but I hope the next Part will make the connection to brands more generally clear.

II. TRANSFORMATIONS OF BODIES

Here, then, we have different kinds of product, associated with different producers, but that are also versions of the same thing. There are two key elements of branding apparent: an authenticity condition (given by history), and a recognition condition (given by shape and color). I hope you will follow me in exploring how these two combine

⁵ They are not unique in this. See, e.g., THOMAS G. HARDING, *VOYAGERS OF THE VITIAZ STRAIT: A STUDY OF THE NEW GUINEA TRADE SYSTEM* 30 (1967) (describing the extensive inter-island trading network and the specialization of production in each place in pre-colonial times); Alice Pomponio, *Namor's Odyssey: Mythical, Metaphors and History in Siassi*, PAC. STUD., Dec. 1994, at 53, 53 (discussing Mandok Islanders' Legend of Namor and its historical value to the Islanders). There are many “Traveling Hero” stories of Papua and Australia in which each made unique features of the landscape in the different places they visited. Each place, therefore, has a unique relation to the Traveling Hero in any given case. See ALAN RUMSEY & JAMES F. WEINER, *EMPLACED MYTH: SPACE, NARRATIVE, AND KNOWLEDGE IN ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIA AND PAPUA NEW GUINEA* 11-12 (Alan Rumsey & James F. Weiner eds., 2001). Whether we would be correct to call this a variety of differentiation through branding according to place will emerge.

in this case. This involves thinking about why tubers (or other things) take the form that they do.

It is only common sense to recognize that different soil types and climates have effects on what is grown in them — in fact, we have a concept (or rather borrow one from the French, that of “terroir”) for just this emergent distinctiveness. Wine experts endlessly extol the virtues of different soil types and microclimates that result in different tastes from the pinot noir grape (for example),⁶ a grape that famously takes on the characteristic flavors of its soil and climate. They also recognize that clones taken from this vine in Burgundy are superior, but that they develop particular characteristics as they adapt to new terroir conditions. Dijon clones may be the starting point for Oregon vineyards, but their adaptation is an important part of the distinctiveness and emergence of specific styles.⁷

While viniculture is surely significant to these emergent distinctions, the Rai Coast version of human influence over the development of tubers is very elaborate. Terroir is a somewhat elusive concept. In contrast, Reite people’s understanding of what constitutes real taro, of how it relates to people and their actions and to its place of gestation, is less so. They are very clear about the influence of places on growth and quite explicit about the fact that people and taro are in a mutually constitutive set of relations. That is because taro is grown as part of relations to specific other people. It is something cultivated to have certain effects on other people. Of course things grow in the highly fecund jungle. That is not the same as *being grown*. As Coupaye puts it, “Things are not just consumable, they are made so.”⁸ People know where taro is grown, who it is grown for, and which bodies it will contribute to forming. The tuber’s growth in the garden manifests the labor of someone working for another person, and their success indexes the moral and ritual condition of the gardener, his history, and placement.

How and why are taro tubers distinctive? Why do they transform upon relocation? What is the connection to producers? These are questions about the way perceptible differences between entities are

⁶ HUGH JOHNSON & JANCIS ROBINSON, *THE WORLD ATLAS OF WINE* 26-27, 56-57 (6th ed. 2007) (discussing the influence of soil type and elevation in Burgundy).

⁷ See, e.g., WILLAKENZIE ESTATE WINES, <http://www.willakenzie.com/our-wines/pinot-noirs/#.Uax30-uBUr0> (last visited Aug. 30, 2013) (listing examples of Dijon Clones and their adaptation).

⁸ Ludovic Coupaye, *What’s the Matter with Technology?: Long (and Short) Yams, Materialisation and Technology in Nyamikum Village, Maprik District, Papua New Guinea*, 20 *AUSTL. J. ANTHROPOLOGY* 93, 93 (2009).

interwoven with authenticating conditions (or history). Knowledge becomes very interesting here, particularly because the shape and form of the tuber itself is a manifestation of particular relations, including relations to the powers that cause growth in the tuber. Each place has its own version of the taro myth because each place manifests a different version of the power of growth. The appropriate forms of planting at the center of a Waaping garden are different from those in Reite because they enact a different series of relations. The names sung over the tubers as they are planted and the plants that accompany those tubers are ways of locating those tubers at a different point in generative webs. Land differs, water differs, people differ, and the ways of getting the best from a place — a complex combination of these elements — therefore changes. Knowledge here is manifest in the tuber itself as the nexus; tubers manifest the particularity of history and current relations.

When I talk of myth, then, I am referencing a condensed version of knowledge of this positioning. (But note well that places never exist in isolation, and that transformation, not stability, is the condition of human and taro existence.) Myth ensures that the substance taken into the tuber as it swells in the ground is drawn from that nexus: not just the physical locality, nor indeed the particular procedures of those people, but from all the other relations that support, differentiate, conflict with, and are part of the emergence of a distinctive entity. The substance from a place is drawn in through a relational field in which others are also significant.⁹ Taro is not taro just by growing; it is taro because it is already located in and of the human world. Growth is always particular if it is human growth (recognized). It must come from somewhere, be attributable to particular others (authentic), and, indeed, is claimed as such. That claim is apparent in the assertion, for example, that kapa is a recognizable Reite variety. And also in the fact that when kapa is grown, it manifests the Reite taro patuki or a connection with it. This is directly related to the next Part of my exposition: about people and their growth and transformation.

III. INITIATION STYLES

I turn, then, to initiations, and to the trade and transfer of initiation styles. Again, like taro (which is not taro unless grown as such), we will see that men are not men unless they are grown as such. A body must take a recognizable form, and that form is one that is given

⁹ See TIM INGOLD, *THE PERCEPTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT: ESSAYS IN LIVELIHOOD, DWELLING AND SKILL* 149 (2000).

authenticity by positioning in relation to specific others. Both recognition and authenticity conditions again apply. I highlight a developing theme here: authenticity means transformation, not stability. To achieve a “brand” is to achieve a form that *transforms* on relocation. “Constructed in relation to one another, these positions cannot be apprehended axiomatically.”¹⁰ I choose to present this aspect of the material through contrasting stories of success and failure in the performance of initiation rites. A little background is again required.

There are various forms of male initiation in this region. In Reite, male initiation was undertaken through what is called “seeing the male-cult spirits” (seeing the “tambaran” in Neo-Melanesian pidgin). “To see the tambaran” was to engage in the long, and in many ways arduous, process of seclusion, restriction, instruction, transformation, and emergence that made a boy into a man. In other writings I have dwelt at some length on the procedure, and also on the fact that the process is one in which relations that constitute the person as a child (to mother and father, for example) are explicitly replaced by placing the person in new relations¹¹: to the spirits, to their maternal kin, to the ancestors through new knowledge about their doings.¹² These substitutions, of one set of relations for another, are dramatized through separation, seclusion, a new appearance, and perhaps most significantly, new obligations on emergence. An initiate is, of necessity, obligated to his initiators: his transformation will fail (and he will sicken) if he does not provide wealth and food for them over an extended period as an explicit enactment of these new constitutive and sustaining relations.

His initiators reciprocate by supporting his activities *as a man, not a child*. That, in turn, makes it necessary for the initiate to engage differently with his natal kin and parents, whom he must now draw on for wealth and garden land in his own name and own right. All this is to say that the transformation in his body is not symbolic, if we were

¹⁰ MARILYN STRATHERN, *THE GENDER OF THE GIFT* 64 (1988) [hereinafter *GENDER*].

¹¹ See Aletta Biersack, *Ginger Gardens for the Ginger Woman: Rites and Passages in a Melanesian Society*, 17 *MAN NEW SERIES* 239, 241 (1982).

¹² See, e.g., ANTHONY FORGE, *PRIMITIVE ART AND SOCIETY*, at xviii (1972) (stating that primitive art objects are about relationships); STRATHERN, *GENDER*, *supra* note 10, at 244-45 (noting that the new knowledge of ancestors is part of what is transferred in specific initiation sequences); Gillian Gillison, *Images of Nature in Gimi Thought*, in *NATURE, CULTURE AND GENDER* 143, 170-72 (Carol P. McCormack & Marilyn Strathern eds., 1980) (discussing the importance of changing the relationship orientation of initiation participants toward their ancestors and each other).

to mean “just symbolic.”¹³ The rite transforms his relations to others in a manner that makes him act differently and with regard to other (new) people. In acting differently, he is recognized as a grown man with the resources and abilities to enter into affinal relations. He is a man because of his form, and that form is the on-going production of all those who now constitute and have an interest in his appearance as such (including in time, his wife).¹⁴ Those to whom he owes wealth and recognition for the transformation are obviously also those with the strongest interest in his success. (And the specter of the angry or disinterested mother’s brother, so common in this region, is thus comprehensible; they are someone who can forcibly circumscribe the possibilities of the nephew through their “influence,”¹⁵ be that manifest as sickness in the body, or failure in gardening and ritual.) His developing identity is dependent upon and owed to them.¹⁶ We could say they both recognize and authenticate his form.

“Seeing the tambaran” has different manifestations depending on where it happens. Reite has a set of rites that introduce initiands to the secret paraphernalia of the male cult. These rites are called, euphemistically, “seeing the tambaran of the water.” Water, here, refers to the residing place of the spirits that the male cult evokes and draws forth.¹⁷ It is a musical cult: the spirits themselves manifest as “voices.” They are made present by the cult (relying on the secret paraphernalia) as different tunes. While men and women sing along with the spirit voices, these spirit voices are distinct from the men’s — they are ethereal, otherworldly, and strange.

Reite is located about ten kilometers inland from the sea. People on the coast speak different native languages. They also have a different form of initiation.¹⁸ And the “tamabaran of the water” has been

¹³ A symbolic study is not substantively restricted (for example, to the examination of myth or ritual or some special, predefined class of objects). Rather, the practices by means of which actors construct their social world, and simultaneously their own selves and modes of being in the world, are thought to be symbolically constituted and themselves symbolic processes. NANCY D. MUNN, *THE FAME OF GAWA: A SYMBOLIC STUDY OF VALUE TRANSFORMATION IN A MASSIM (PAPUA NEW GUINEA) SOCIETY* 7 (1986).

¹⁴ Consider the fact that a wife and husband work together to produce her bride wealth payment to her natal kin. She has just as much interest in constituting his position as a man with affines as he does.

¹⁵ See ROY WAGNER, *THE CURSE OF SOUW: PRINCIPLES OF DARIBI CLAN DEFINITION AND ALLIANCE IN NEW GUINEA* 63, 66, 74 (1967).

¹⁶ See JAMES LEACH, *CREATIVE LAND: PLACE AND PROCREATION ON THE RAI COAST OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA* 151, 154-56 (2003).

¹⁷ For example, Samat Matakaring patuki resides at a water spring. See *supra* Part I.

¹⁸ It is not necessary to know the specifics of the different details for the

replaced as the major initiation in Reite in recent decades by their form. During what is known locally as the “good time,” that is, the period before World War II when German and then British and Australian colonial presence reduced hostilities between different language and kinship groups in the region, people from Reite and surrounding villages, such as Maibang, began to travel more freely. Now, there had always been some trading between the mountains above Reite, and the coast, and thus between Reite and Maibang people and coastal dwellers. In fact, coastal people were connected in a series of trade networks that ran along the coast both north and south, and to the islands in the Vitiaz Straits.¹⁹ These coastal dwellers were not a homogeneous group. Some were settlers from the islands. But, in general, people living on the coast spoke variations of Austronesian languages, while only ten kilometers further inland, Reite and Maibang people speak languages classified as Papuan or Non-Austronesian.²⁰

These coastal dwellers then had initiations of their own, and of another type. It does not involve the production of musical spirit voices but “seeing the tambaran of the sea” and being subjected to “the teeth” of this tambaran. In other ways, the rites are similar: boys are secluded for a period of up to three months, they observe strict taboos on food and particularly on the consumption of water, their behavior is closely regulated, and they are instructed in various ways by their mother’s brothers. Reite people see no contradiction between the two initiations. One adds to the other, and boys still “see the tambaran of the water” at the time when they are secluded after “seeing the tambaran of the sea.”

In Reite and Maibang “seeing the tambaran of the sea” has become the norm over the last thirty to forty years. As more interaction happened during the “good time,” one or two, and then more and more, Reite and Maibang men went through this initiation. To do so, they had to travel to one of the villages on the coast where it was practiced. And that involved having kinsmen there to sponsor their entry, and support the boy through the grueling months of seclusion. Boys must be “watched over” by a kinsman and supplied with food on a regular basis. There are many moments in the procedure that require special foods and gifts for the various initiators and spirits that work

exposition and argument I wish to advance. This is fortunate, as I am not at liberty to reveal them in any case.

¹⁹ See HARDING, *supra* note 5, at 14-19.

²⁰ See STEPHEN A. WURM & SHIRŌ HATTORI, LANGUAGE ATLAS OF THE PACIFIC AREA 25 (1981).

on producing a transformation in the bodies of the boys. Domestic pigs and pork are crucial elements of payment throughout, including the very acceptance of a boy by the leader or owner of a rite.

There is an aspect to this story, that I will not elaborate on here, that deals with the arrival of these initiations along with trade along the coast and from the islands. It is those islands that everyone agrees are the origin of "the tambaran of the sea." But it is well to be aware that they were very secretive. If I have told a story of rapid spread and proliferation, it must be understood against this background of secrecy, enforced by fear and force up until, and including, today. We are looking here at persistence, not continuity. My Reite informants said their fathers had encountered similar procedures while traveling as labor recruits further afield long before they knew their neighbors on the coast practiced a similar thing. Even getting an acknowledgment of the existence of this in their neighboring coastal villages and having access for their children was, and is, something that is still constantly negotiated. It is also costly.

Now, given the secrecy, the fear (and force with which it is backed up), and the value of holding these rites in terms of reputation and the wealth that can be attracted from the kin of initiates, what I report next may be something of a surprise. The rites are regularly traded for others to perform. In particular they appear to have been "franchised" out to people in Reite and Maibang. It is vital to remember that each rite has a distinct style, that is, a distinct way of presenting the initiates on their emergence. Any unauthorized replication, either of the procedure or of the appearance, brings swift and serious demands for compensation.

A few senior men, first in Sorang (a village west of Reite, but in the same language group), then in Maibang/Pateng village, and then in Asang village, approached specific men in different coastal villages to plead for the right to perform the initiation themselves, in their own place.²¹ In each case, valuables (pigs) were given to the owners of the rites. They came and performed the rite in the new place, each time

²¹ When asked about the reasons for bringing the initiation to Reite or to Maibang, the people responsible spoke of "practicality." All young men want to have this initiation now. In fact, there have been instances of "theft," where unauthorized procedures were discovered. (I witnessed the tense and costly confrontation between coastal owners and Reite people myself once resulting from such a "theft.") "Practicality" here covers making sure they do not happen anyway and cause deaths through sorcery, or result in huge compensation payments; as well as the physical difficulty of supporting Reite youth through months of arduous and demanding physical rites and taboos when they are located more than 10 kilometers away from home, and thus from gardens, houses for their kinsmen to sleep in, etc.

receiving pigs and wealth for doing so; and, finally, when satisfied that the local leader was competent in yet another exchange ceremony, they were given the right to perform these themselves. At each subsequent performance there is a requirement to acknowledge the source of the initiation on the part of the leader through gifts of wealth and meat informing them of their intention, but by this point, the initiations were “owned” by particular Sorang, Asang, or Maibang men.

What is relevant here is the way initiations produce what are said to be different kinds of men, and that these differences are indicated by the different appearances, including the dress, paint, valuables, etc., that the initiates wear when they finally appear in public after their transformation. These differences are not superficial. Or rather, not superficial in the understanding of those who view and discuss them. Identity conditions indicate quality *and* authenticity. This matter goes to the heart of what an initiation does, and also the interesting parallels between initiations as particular styles of appearance and taro varieties.

As we have seen, different places have different tambarans. And this is visible in the appearance of the men who come from them. This is because, just as with taro, what is grown is grown in a particular place, that is, in a different set of relations. Taro or “the tamabaran of the sea” are all the same (class of thing), or are all completely different (because of different origin and constitution manifesting in different form). They are unique and different because they manifest a different and specific history.

IV. TWO CONTRASTING INITIATION EVENTS

In 1995, each of the three inland villages I have mentioned staged versions of “the tambaran of the sea.” Each had purchased the right to do so from a different coastal village — Biliau, Yaimas (via Pateng),²² and Singor, respectively. The names are not important, although they help the reader follow the plot and the contrasts between the events. In Maibang’s case, I say, “via Pateng,” as the original owners sanctioned a particular man in Pateng, a village closely allied to Maibang, to perform the rite which he had done on a number of occasions. He then, in turn, passed it on to a Maibang man, for whom this was also the latest in a series of events.

Maibang’s version was, by all accounts, not a success. My Reite kinsmen who were there supporting one of their sister’s sons (the sister married in Maibang) were forthcoming in their description of its

²² This will become clearer below.

inadequacies. I was able to join the neophytes as they were being decorated before their final emergence. The "owner," or leader, of the initiation wept loudly and obviously in front of them as they were being covered in paint and valuables, saying he was crying because it was the last time he would give boys (his) power. There had been a dispute, and he would not be doing this again. He was crying for his last power.

Once decorated, the boys were led out of their seclusion and through the village for the first time. They wore red paint on their skin, dogs' teeth and shell valuables, and red laplap (a piece of cloth wound around the waist in a manner reminiscent of the garb worn by colonial servants in the region in the past). They carried new woven coconut leaf baskets containing a new bamboo lime container for eating betel nut (*Areca catechu*). Those who cared for them in seclusion accompanied them. After lining them up for inspection, the owner then announced that this was the first time he had revealed new men "as white men." In the past, he said he had followed his ancestors (meaning the boys had appeared wearing the bark-cloth loincloths traditional to these inland villages).²³ He emphasized that it was his strength, and his strength alone, that had "brought them back from the deeps of the sea." He "might have lost some over the side of the canoe," but he had "been strong and brought them all safely back to shore."

At this point, he raised the dispute again. (The dispute was with the man from Pateng who had purchased the right to the initiation from kinsmen in Yaimas, the coastal village.) We were told that this Pateng man had complained throughout the initiation and it was (again) only the strength of the leader who had brought the boys to manhood in spite of this. But, he said he had had enough. He would not lead any more initiations. There was too much complaining. After succeeding with so many boys he had a heavy heart and nurtured a grievance at giving up.

Rather to my surprise, with the new initiates standing there in the hot sun, paint gleaming with sweat, there followed a long and heated argument. It was said that although the Pateng man had given his permission, it was only specific families (those who had paid him with pigs) that could join these franchised initiations. And then there was the "white man" aspect of the boy's appearance. That was not the way

²³ It is worth noting that twenty years after independence, colonial dress was still seen as novel. White people, rather than coastal people, were associated with cloth in these inland villages, although the style for wearing cloth had been borrowed from coastal people.

the Pateng man countenanced, and he was angry about that, as well. There was much coming and going, all there in front of the boys and the crowd which had gathered to witness their emergence, until the local magistrate said it was dangerous to talk about these things in public, and they must sort them out in private. Food was not served.

As we walked back to Reite, my companions said that it was a poor initiation. The initiates had not lost weight properly, they did not shine and draw the eye, and it was hard to tell who they were from their supporters, and thus the new men from the old. One noted that no one had come from any distance to see them emerge, and suggested that the poor appearance of the boys and their lack of a distinct and arresting appearance was likely a result of the context of the rite. The correct conditions for identity had not been established one way or another.

In Asang's and Sorang's versions, there was a much stronger sense of protocol apparent from the outset. In Asang, the neophytes appeared twice. First, in a bark loin cloth and carrying a black palm baton (associated with a version of the inland male cult), and then, after another behind the scenes delay in which they drank water for the first time, they returned in red laplap and with woven coconut leaf baskets. People commented on how the boys had lost weight (a desirable thing). In this event, the leader of the initiation made it clear that he had only been given permission to perform this rite once. He told everyone that because it was an initiation brought from a coastal group, he had included their style of wearing red laplap as well as his own of bark loin cloths. There was talk of the importance of discipline and following custom strictly by initiates, and then, calling each of the surrounding villages in turn, he invited them to come and eat a plate of cooked pork meat and taro tubers. This was to "purchase" their "hard work" in coming to witness the emergence of the men of this place.²⁴ Much talk during the meal and afterwards was directed to the quality of the paint on the skins of the boys, to how it shone, to how fine they looked in one or the other of their costumes, and comparing them to what emerged from other initiations. Notice that in each case, the physical appearance of the initiates was under close scrutiny, as were their accessories.

There is an important combination here between elements of what we might like to call "style" (following a long anthropological tradition) and of "brand." If brand is a more vigorous (marketing) version of what Papua New Guinea people, in their recent world of

²⁴ We could not subsequently deny we had witnessed this, and acknowledged its success by consuming what was provided.

easy travel and heightened opportunity for cultural transfer, acknowledge as style (*stail* in Neo-Melanesian) differences, then what we have in the transmission of initiations resembles “brands” in that they are whole images that demonstrate both identity conditions and authenticity. They have the protection afforded to them. There is a vigorous defense of particular appearances and images that indicate quality and distinctiveness. As I discuss below, it is also clear that they are unlike brands in that what is protected is not an essence of quality tied to a static image and persistent quality, but the power to make or produce that image²⁵ in a new version.

V. DISCUSSION: WHAT IS IN AN IMAGE?

One initiation goes right, and another goes wrong. Why? And what has it to do with brands? One answer is that Maibang did not achieve a distinctive appearance, a recognizable difference, in the initiates’ bodies. In turn, this is because the authenticity conditions were not realized in a very particular sense. There was something in the relation between origin and replication that went awry, and this appeared in the form of the image itself. Relations to origin were inadequate and that meant that they could not demonstrate the power to have their re-composition accepted. Achievement in this regard would have meant recognition for the new owner *and* recognition for the previous owners who carry on with their own distinctive style of producing men, while also receiving recognition from those that view the initiations performed by the new owner. The point about the relationship is crucial. It is there that the form and the identity are specified.

As Wagner argues, and Strathern elaborates,²⁶ an image is always whole.²⁷ To produce something for others to view is to act to produce an image. In that sense, an act is always whole, always the presentation of a complete entity. “This is . . . the singularity not of individualism but of relationism. In order to appear in another’s eyes

²⁵ See, e.g., Roy Wagner, *The Talk of Koriki: A Daribi Contact Cult*, 46 SOC. RES. 140, 156-61 (1979) (analogizing to a Daribi cult’s retelling of European contact that evolves over time).

²⁶ MARILYN STRATHERN, KINSHIP, LAW AND THE UNEXPECTED: RELATIVES ARE ALWAYS A SURPRISE 192 n.17 (2005) [hereinafter KINSHIP] (“[Y]ou can have an image of half a something but, logically and phenomenologically speaking, you cannot have half an image.”).

²⁷ See generally ROY WAGNER, SYMBOLS THAT STAND FOR THEMSELVES 132 (1986) (stating that an image cannot be divided because “perception of [an] image is personal, and relative to the person”).

as someone of whom the other takes account, the person appears oriented to that particular relationship.”²⁸ That, in turn, means privileging a particular (appropriate) content in the image generated.

The revelation of the neophytes is intended as a complete image, a distinctive “brand” that *within itself* contains these particular referents to its origin while at the same time demonstrating its distinctive power of transformation. As Nancy Munn puts it, the criteria for success, judged by the viewers moves then “from the *overt* forms of acts — their ‘mere facticity,’ in Cassirer’s terms — to the ‘internal relations’ that give them *significant* form and that specify the nature of the value produced.”²⁹ One could say the relations that specify for whom value is produced is a necessary element of its appearance.

In these cases, an act/image only has power (is recognized as a distinctive production) once it has been accepted. In the case of both taro, Mai’anderi, and initiation brands, that acceptance amounts to a decomposition of the whole that has arrived and its reconstitution in a form that makes the relationship to its source visible. The visibility of that relation to source can only be one aspect of what is presented. What we must comprehend is that the new version of an initiation style in Reite is not a copy of the old. It is a transformation that *demonstrates the power or capacity of both parties to the transaction*.³⁰

If a “whole thing” is the projection of the form that completed acts must take³¹ in Melanesia, then Reite became the origin point of taro in the act of sending Mai’anderi away. Her “completeness,” the completeness of the act, made distribution possible. Taro and woman combined to make her into a unique image. The act was a whole thing that could be received as such, oriented towards the particular other. To have its effect, that act needed to be decomposed, taken apart, and that had to be by this particular other in whose regard it was accomplished. It is the combination of act and counter-act that makes the effect and generates an identity for both parties. That identity is apparent in the distinctive form of taro in Reite, their “brand” of taro and its linked contrast to the form of taro in Waaping.

²⁸ STRATHERN, KINSHIP, *supra* note 26, at 121.

²⁹ MUNN, *supra* note 13, at 6 (citing 1 ERNST CASSIRER, THE PHILOSOPHY OF SYMBOLIC FORMS 74 (Ralph Manheim trans., 1955)).

³⁰ Marilyn Strathern, *Eating (and Feeding)*, 30 CAMBRIDGE ANTHROPOLOGY 1, 12 (2012).

³¹ See JAMES F. WEINER, THE LOST DRUM: THE MYTH OF SEXUALITY IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA AND BEYOND 27 (1995).

In her wonderful account of trade and value creation among Gawa islanders, Nancy Munn develops her notion of “spacetime” as an indicator of value creation. Munn argues that:

Gawan society has to be understood in its terms of its grounding in [an] inter-island world. On the one hand, the community asserts its own *internal* viability through the concept of its positive evaluation by . . . *external* others, expressed in the Gawan emphasis on fame (*butu-*), the renown or good name of Gawa in this world. On the other hand, fame itself . . . can be produced for Gawans only through an initial externalizing process involving the separation of internal elements of Gawa (especially garden crops and canoes, which are the produce of its land and trees) and their transaction into the inter-island world.³²

She continues, stating that “in the Gawan case, value may be characterized . . . in terms of an act’s relative capacity to extend or expand what I call *intersubjective spacetime* — a spacetime of self-other relationships formed in and through acts and practices.”³³

Munn’s “spacetime” highlights the extension of the self through relations with others. It does so in a particular mode we can identify as Melanesian. And within that mode, although it is clear the differentiation of styles is important, there is something more like branding apparent in the way acts and images must be necessarily whole images. It is in that wholeness that the possibility for identity and authenticity is given. But the mechanisms for achieving the recognition of those elements are also instructively different from legally protected brands.

Acts or images reveal the internal relations of their constitution, and thus reveal the capacity for extension in those relations. The distinctiveness and the quality of products are consequent upon their constitution. Acts that appear as images are necessarily “whole” moments or entities, but to be effective, to achieve a satisfactory attribution of effectiveness, they require reception. It is when others realize this capacity that the authenticity of the original is confirmed. How they are received is a matter of the redeployment of their elements. And that is not the work of the producer or their act. Successful acts are known by the subsequent acts they engender: by the ability given by them for others to make value appear from those

³² MUNN, *supra* note 13, at 6 (citation omitted).

³³ *Id.* at 9.

elements. In other words, the successful decomposition of an act is also to add elements of one's own³⁴ and, in doing so, transform them by and through extension.

The distinctiveness of the original act as a branded image, and its relation to the style associated with particular origin or place, is only of value, then, in its capacity to elicit acts of decomposition and recombination from others. As Munn puts it: "Thus intrinsic to the value-production process is the evaluative rendering of the self by significant others."³⁵ This process extends the influence, names, and presence of an entity or actor or place into space and time, creating value for all those involved. "[T]he spatiotemporal value transformations effected in given types of practice can be viewed as transformations of the value of the actor's self. In producing a given level of spatiotemporal extension beyond the self, actors produce their own value,"³⁶ where "*extension* means here the capacity to develop spatiotemporal relations that go beyond the self . . ."³⁷ When it comes to receiving initiations, then, it is the man who is able to take the whole image of the "new man" that an initiation sequence elsewhere has produced, and add or subtract subtly from the form that those "new men" appear in, that demonstrates a distinctive identity for the new initiation *in relation* to the source.

There is more to this, then, than the purchase of rights to perform a rite. Purchase or franchise comes to appear as an inadequate description for the transmission of branded initiations. Here, rights are not alienated from one owner to the next as in a property transaction, but are earned through a continual evaluation of the identity of the images produced. People make the brand their own. They do so as a conscious and explicit modification. In this, then, the difference from legally recognized product brands is most apparent. What is franchised is not the right to copy, nor to label, but the right to include in a re-formation, which momentarily eclipses and yet extends the original. It is a reproductive, not consumptive, act. The appearance as a decorated initiate, a momentarily completed image of a man from a particular place, invites others (specifically potential affines) to view him, and by viewing him, to enter into their own relations with him.

³⁴ See generally TONY CROOK, ANTHROPOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE, SECRECY, AND BOLIVIP, PAPUA NEW GUINEA: EXCHANGING SKIN (2007) (exploring how the Min people of Papua New Guinea perceive knowledge making as "exchanging skin" with others).

³⁵ MUNN, *supra* note 13, at 15.

³⁶ *Id.* at 15.

³⁷ *Id.* at 11.

Those relations depend upon decomposing his whole image and engaging his kin in exchanges resulting from subsequent marriage.

Distinctiveness here is not controlled as an essence that is threatened by its replication elsewhere, but as a claim to a specific connection. It is the relationship that is owned. And that explains the spread and transmission. People seek to extend their spacetime, to use Munn’s term. I said earlier that we must view the proliferation of initiation rites as persistence, not continuity. Within the global flow of images and styles, identities and products, these are examples of branding that instantiate principles other than straightforward identity protection or quality assurance. They, in fact, are generative of identities in their emergence, and that emergence demonstrates quality in the facilitator. Does that mean they are not brands after all?

CONCLUSION: BRANDING TRANSFORMATIONS?

The taro stories show clearly the importance of transformation. If there had been no transmission, taro would still be in one original form. But that is not the point at all. This is a system in which the recognition of an identity as a “brand” (a whole image that has authenticity and identity conditions, that is protected) is an invitation to decompose it and remake something from the component parts. What is made must share elements with the original, but not its form. Brands in initiation are both necessarily part of, or connected to, their origin point *and* different at the same time. It is in this combination that distinctiveness is generated (identity conditions are satisfied).

The spread of, and the trade in, initiation brands, then, is not a surprise after all. That they are traded, and that modifications are to be expected and accepted, relies upon a system of branding that anticipates transformation. Merely copying would mean incorporation, and that is not the purpose. Identity conditions and authenticity conditions are explicitly aspects of the relation between originator and adopter. For the brand to appear, that relation must be sustained.

For identity conditions to be satisfied, that is, for a distinctive initiation brand to be achieved (one that will subsequently draw initiands and wealth to the owners), authenticity conditions must be satisfied. Authenticity in this case is a complex social production requiring the extension in time and space of the influence of others, and its appearance in a new form that while different, does not undermine its identification as drawing on its source. A “brand” as a condensed image of particular relations (read “power”) comes to look rather different from a brand as a mark of a distinctive essence of quality and identity. The oscillation, between whole act/product/image

(i.e., brand) and its decomposition and re-composition elsewhere, is where value is realized. The brand extends the influence and reach of its makers, but only through its incorporation and transformation.

For these initiation styles to be recognized as brands, one stretches what legal scholars would understand a brand to be both in substance and in category. Brands fix an image that, because of the distinctive nature of its mark or form, cannot be decomposed. It can be copied, legitimately in a franchise situation or illegitimately in a knock-off, but those copies extend or undermine its reach as *the same thing*: an identity that can be attached or detached from particular products. Brands, then, make true objects out of the things transacted. They stabilize them.³⁸ They replace the vitality of the relationship between the transactors that we see in the Melanesian material, a vitality *that changes both thing and transactor*, with a different quality — that of a generic mark of essential identity. In contrast, taro varieties and initiation styles are produced as distinct, and convey distinct identities, *when they are the thing itself*. The appearance, the image, the body is the distinctiveness. These differences revolve around the different form that objects and images take in different regimes of value creation and control.

The Forsythe Company's double bind, needing to promote something marketable as "brand Forsythe" while recognizing that the branding mechanism distorts and undermines the vitality of their transformative practice, shows that processes closer to home are illuminated by the comparison with Melanesian ethnographic material. As a marketing technology, branding has to assume a generic consumer. It has to make a consistent product appear where that consistency cannot be transformation itself. We might conclude that the pervasive and expansionist tendency of branding as the fixing of an essence of identity linked to a product is not appropriate to certain kinds of value production. Those kinds of value production are specifically where development, transformation, and responsiveness are crucial to the image or thing transacted. This kind of value production is very much part of life, be it in Melanesia or Europe. It is possible to argue that trademark law is inadequate in as far as the logic of branding renders it impossible to recognize such value.

I hope the reader will agree that I have not subjected taro or initiations to any imagined analytic properties of the concept of

³⁸ See Celia Lury, *Trade Mark Style as a Way of Fixing Things*, in TRADE MARKS AND BRANDS: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY CRITIQUE 201, 212, 222 (Bently et al. eds., 2008) (stating that brands create product identities and these represent differences in product quality).

brands, nor have I suggested they are versions of, or proto versions of, brands. But I have examined how the elements of branding — authenticity, and identity — might be re-imagined in the light of modes of value creation that persist within the global flows of capitalism.