



LECTURE

Dramas of otherness

“First contact” tourism in New Guinea

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In the 1990s, Korowai people of New Guinea became famous in the global mass media for their amazing “treehouses.” Over the last quarter-century they have been visited by upwards of five thousand tourists and fifty television film crews, seeking experience of an indigenous society beyond the reach of global consumer culture. These tourists often find meetings with Korowai deeply moving. A retired Swedish tour leader who took thirty groups to the area said: “It is so different from other trips. It is a spiritual trip. . . . People say about the trips, you cannot explain them to others. For the first month home, in your thoughts you are back in Korowai.” Also typical is a Spanish woman’s descriptions of her visit to Korowai as “the experience of a lifetime” and an “incredible life lesson.”¹ A New Yorker under treatment for cancer asked her doctor whether he would permit her to travel internationally, and

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1. <http://www.sonystas.com/foro/fotografia-social/korowais-el-viaje-de-mi-vida-parte-i/>.



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when she described her planned itinerary “to the treehouse people,” the physician said, “You must go.” By chance, he had earlier made the same trip.

A basic feature of these tourism encounters is that tourists and Korowai alike pay heightened attention to the *differences* between themselves and the others. This is what I refer to by the phrase “dramas of otherness.” The main question I seek to address here is: What makes these dramas of otherness special, desirable, and even mythic? A second question is: How do the encounters take place in regular and valued ways, across such otherness? Anthropology today is very fragmented, but one shared paradigmatic orientation lying behind dozens of different theoretical coats-of-arms is a question of the character of articulations between people whose life conditions and orienting ideas are sharply heterogeneous. Interactions between Korowai and tourists are one ideal site for thinking about how it is possible for ordered relations to exist across radical difference.

In this case, the unlikely social coordination is also specifically across asymmetries in scale and power. Tourists have at their backs mass publics and market institutions of industrial production and consumption encompassing billions of people. Korowai are only about four thousand in number. They live in small linked kin networks across five hundred square miles of forest in the middle of the island of New Guinea, and specifically in the island’s western half, which is part of Indonesia. Owing to the peculiar geographic position of their land and the lack of easily exploited resources there, Korowai remain on what could be described as the “super-periphery” of Indonesian national society and global market networks (Cole 2008:18). They did not have regular interactions with long-distance strangers until 1978, when Dutch missionaries established a post on one edge of their land. Korowai make their livelihoods largely from their own banana gardens and sago palm stands. They strongly value self-determination and reject hierarchy, which is why they live far apart. But they also prize kin relations and other social connections across difference, which, like other people of the New Guinea region, they see as most importantly knowable through balanced giving of material possessions, like food.

While Korowai are small in number and in economic power, they have very actively applied their own ideas about social life to the new institutions, people, and hierarchies with which they are increasingly involved. This photograph is a good metaphor of what Korowai and tourists see in each other (Fig. 1).² Much of the relation between Korowai and tourists turns on a criss-cross pattern that occurs in other tourism destinations as well, centered on the imbalance visible here between the quantity of possessions on the bodies of the two men. The tourist on the right in this photo feels he wants to *become* the person on the left, whom he admires as a quasi divinity because of his total lack of manufactured consumer goods. Meanwhile, the person on the left feels he wants to *become* the person on the right, whom he admires as a quasi divinity because of his unlimited access to manufactured consumer goods. Otherness of material life is only one thread in the wider drama of otherness between tourists and Korowai, but it is the one I will focus on here. It is an area where the drama of otherness is also very much a drama of hierarchy and desire.

2. It is unusual for tourists or media professionals to carry their largest bags themselves, in the manner depicted in this image.



Figure 1: A Swiss film director takes leave of Mbelufale Manianxatun, 2007.

To address why the encounters are attractive and how they work, across this lecture I will discuss three interconnected modes of dramatization of otherness—or modes of heightened attention to otherness—that I will introduce through the allegory of some transitions in the life of Lewis Henry Morgan. Morgan's initial path toward ethnographic research was his youthful leadership in the 1840s of a secret literary fraternity called the "The Gordian Knot," in reference to Alexander the Great, but that Morgan soon renamed "The Grand Order of the Iroquois," reflecting greater focus on imitating supposedly Indian dress, names, and social forms. In a ritual Morgan scripted, new white initiates to the club were "Inindianated," or made Indian, by another white club member in the role of the Indian "Great Spirit" asking the new initiates to reduce the grief of past and present Indians about their inevitable disappearance by creating books recording the Indians' "names, customs and . . . deeds" (Carnes 1989: 95, 200 n. 6; Deloria 1998:77–78; Moses 2009:49–50; see also Simpson 2014: 67–94).

In other words, club members performed stereotypes of Indianness, as symbols of their own aspirational virtues of settler fraternalism and literary achievement. This focus on a fantasized Indian paralleled an earlier focus on Greek antiquity, in using the other's distance to support a sense of commitment to utopian ideals above the surrounding society (Connelly 1995). Indianness connoted primordial presence on American land, so this figure was also useful for presenting US settler colonial literary production as a rival to European letters, and for cloaking contradictions of the young Republic's basis in Indian dispossession.³

3. On the high cultural contest with Britain, see Morgan (1843). On Native Americans' relation to land as a settler resource for literary nation building, see Henry Schoolcraft's

Desire for improved mimicry of Indian practices and for realizing the club's literary mandate was what initially led Morgan to social involvement with the young Seneca man Ely Parker, and to assisting Seneca legal efforts to annul a corruptly ratified treaty of land cession. This social involvement with Iroquois, and Morgan's exceptional mental openness to learning about how Iroquois acquaintances related to one another, led in turn to his thought becoming less exclusively shaped by stereotypes circulated among white settlers. His mind came to be partly influenced as well by Iroquois practices like matrilineality or calling of cousins by sibling terms. What he learned from Iroquois acquaintances led him in turn to his intellectually revolutionary pursuit in the late 1850s and 1860s of comparative knowledge of how different genealogical positions were lumped together or split apart in kinship vocabularies of eighty Native American languages and forty others worldwide. He found there were elaborate and systematic patterns to other people's languages, and to those people's ordering of otherness among themselves, that differed from what is practiced by speakers of English or other European languages.

Concerning Korowai and tourists, the first mode of heightened attention to otherness I will discuss is exoticizing stereotypy. This is akin to Morgan's early activities of performing generic images of Indianness. The second mode of heightened attention to otherness I discuss is how encounters agitate participants' relation to their own normativity. This is akin to Morgan becoming aware that European language norms of structuring kin relations are highly unusual. This destabilized his idea of himself as the bearer of a universal thought, even if the evolutionist theories by which he later explained kinship diversity reaffirmed his society's patterns as an ultimate standard.

The third mode of heightened attention to otherness I will discuss is what I will call working socially on the otherness of others. This is akin to Morgan's entry into politically complex social relations with Ely Parker and other Seneca, and even his passing fieldwork conversations with other Native Americans on western railroad and steamship trips (Morgan 1959).

Transcendental presence and exoticizing stereotypy

I will first discuss exoticizing stereotypy by talking about tourists' perspectives on the encounters. By calling their ideas exoticizing stereotypes, I imply criticism of

August 1845 address to the fraternity (Resek 1961: 26). Huhndorf (2001) details wider settler identification with Native Americans whom they had defeated and displaced, in which Indian predecessors were made out as prefiguring settler virtues, or settler successors appeared as better Indians than the Indians themselves. On the Jeffersonian Republic's foundation in selling Indian-occupied lands cheaply to unlanded whites as a condition of their capacity for prudent democratic participation, see Gerstle (2015: 17–51). In an 1845 letter, Morgan extended honorary membership in the Grand Order of the Iroquois to Lewis Cass, who had served as Jackson's Secretary of War and overseen Removal. In last year's Morgan lecture, Jessica Cattelino (2015) addressed a contemporary case of land's centrality in the dialectics of US settler colonization and indigenous presence.

the stereotypes as false, self-serving, and possibly harmful. A common response to this type of tourism is to be repelled by its “Human Zoo”-like voyeurism, which is closely intertwined with the exoticizing stereotypy. This critical impulse is important, and it is not felt only by academics. Tourists themselves are often critically ambivalent about the tourism they are involved in. But here I will focus less on what might be disturbing about this tourism than on the question of what makes the encounters attractive and moving. My first answer concerning tourists’ experience is that the encounters are rituals of direct sensory experience of exoticizing stereotypes that partake of qualities of the transcendent or sacred. In effect, Korowai are gods for the tourists, and visiting them is a personal meeting with gods.

The terms by which tourists describe Korowai as transcendent include that they are a “tribal” people who are still “pure,” or “untouched by civilization.” One source of the feeling of transcendental significance in the meetings is here simply the grand temporal and spatial scale of the categories tourists feel they are personally experiencing. The stereotype tourists bring to the encounters flows from a larger model of all human history that can be termed *primitivism*. It is broadly the same model that inspired Morgan’s fraternity, and it is vastly influential in popular thought worldwide today.⁴ Primitivism turns on the idea of a Manichaean contrast and incompatibility between two kinds of humanity, the civilized and the primitive. The civilized is the present and future, superior in technological and economic power, while the primitive is the archaic past, but possibly superior in spiritual virtue and harmony with nature. Sociologist Judith Adler describes tourism in general as an “enacted trope” (1989: 1375–76). A good illustration of what she means is this way that tourists to the Korowai area understand themselves and their hosts, in the microcosm of their face-to-face meetings, to incarnate the macrocosm of all human time and all human diversity, in a marvelous ritual of time travel. The meetings are also imbued with a feeling of repeating the grand-scale history of the last six centuries of European expansionary encounter and colonization, emblemized in a scene of “first contact” *between* the Manichaean poles of civilized and primitive. Korowai, billed as a “last” isolated people, hold larger-than-life power as stand-ins for the entire field of other peoples of the Pacific and the Americas whom tourists understand to have undergone the same primal event across a bigger epoch now concluding in tourists’ own lifetimes.

Intertwined with the large cosmological scale of time and historical archetype that tourists feel they are living out, these encounters also draw an aura of sacredness from how tourists’ primitivist model exists in the first place through its circulation in a vast body of imaginative literature and popular media, from *The Tempest* to *Star Trek*. Tourists routinely link their trips to media templates. In 1998, one American group member was watching a Korowai woman using a mallet to process a sago palm, and said to her co-travelers, “That’s a *National Geographic* moment.” A tour leader recalling past events to me remarked, “It was like getting into the TV screen,” in reference to one of his groups’ experience of sitting quietly in a feast building while Korowai hosts socialized or snored as if they were not there. “You

4. See West (2012) and Keller (2015) for just two recent ethnographic studies of different sites of the framework’s circulation and reproduction. Some further relevant literature is referenced in Stasch (2014b).

feel like you are going to Tolkien's hobbit world," he said more generally of clients' experience of forest trekking to visit treehouses. A Québécois man who recently tried to make a feature fiction film in the Korowai area explained in an online video that he was asking some Korowai landowners to build five ultratall treehouses all together, to "make it . . . really like the Ewoks village kind of architecture."⁵ Korowai do not actually build treetop-level houses to live in, but canopy-level houses are the special style of dwelling they have become known for via *National Geographic*, the BBC, and Discovery (Stasch 2011a). They regularly build houses of that special kind for tour groups, but nobody had ever built so many uselessly tall houses in one place until the Québécois man commissioned his "Ewok village" for the movie he never actually returned to shoot. The main suggestion I wish to make about this regular pattern of tourists understanding or even structuring their encounters in the image of media templates is that intertextuality with imaginative literature and visual media itself connotes a quality of transcendence.

It is partly through that vast network of media representations that many tourists, along with whole larger global publics, maintain a very robust but also blandly generic idea of a uniform condition of tribal society, consisting of hunter-gatherers who live in villages and have chiefs.⁶ Tourists regularly apply the words "tribe," "chief," "hunter-gatherer," and "village" to Korowai they meet, even though none of these words accurately describe anything about traditional Korowai social life. A young Danish hip-hop artist explicitly described himself to me as having an "image in his mind" before coming to the Korowai area. During his time there he was paying careful attention to which experiences matched this image and which did not.

Part of what makes the trips feel transcendent for tourists is how concretely that preexisting idea of a primitive type is reflected toward them, from a thousand different small sensory and social surfaces during their visits (Stasch 2011b: 9–12): the long river trip in an outboard-powered canoe or the chartered small airplane flight, the heat, the malaria pills, the dense forest, the slippery paths, the spectacular treehouses, the bare and beautiful bodies of Korowai laughing, smiling, and working in traditional dress without imported clothes, and much else. Tourists are able to experience their preconception of a transcendental primitive state in all these surfaces of their trip, partly because language obstacles keep them from knowing confusing details of Korowai experience (Adler 1989: 1382–83; Cohen 1989), because

5. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mFb6HkG-BOs> at 16:45. Later he told a Montreal morning television host that Korowai are "like *Avatar*, but for *real*." See *Global Montreal*, July 22, <http://globalnews.ca/video/1465725/tribe-living-like-in-prehistoric-times>, at 1:15. The planned film was to be titled *#Tribe* (read "Hashtag Tribe"). As described at a promotional website that was online across 2015 (but is no longer accessible), the film would star the Québécois man himself as a successful but spiritually adrift lawyer, who is accidentally transported to the Korowai area and goes through a rebirth by being adopted by them and leading them in warfare against their enemies, with the result that when he goes home to Montreal he is able to relate to his girlfriend after all and resume his law career with enthusiasm (<http://tribe-movie.com/#histoire>, accessed August 17, 2015).

6. See again Keller (2015:86–90) on the highly genericizing conflation of distinct people worldwide into a single primitivist schema.

guides and Korowai manage appearances to accommodate tourists' models, and above all because of the mental hold of the primitivist idea itself as an exceptional, special human condition that can be attached to all sorts of concrete signifiers.

Transcendental presence and agitation of normativity

So far I have outlined sources of a feeling of transcendental sacredness that are more the contexts than the contents of stereotypy of the primitive. I have looked at patterns in how the stereotype circulates, how it is concretely realized on tour, or how big an expanse of human time it is relevant to. But the strongest force in giving tourists a feeling of ritual encounter with transcendence is the *content* of the idea of the primitive, and to discuss that means peering through exoticizing stereotypy to consider the second mode of heightened attention to otherness I mentioned earlier, the way tourism encounters agitate participants' relation to their own normativity, or agitate their relation to their own condition of living historically and culturally.

An illustration is the ubiquitous idea that Korowai are "isolated," or have only recently been "contacted," which is closely related to the time-focused idea that their lives are unchanged from the deep human past. When tourists and travel writers elaborate on the meaning of this concept of Korowai being "uncontacted," what they most often say is that it amounts to being uninfluenced by "civilization." And they most centrally define "civilization" in turn as the condition of living by consumption of mass commodities. This idea of being "isolated" seems like a description of Korowai, but it is actually a description in negative of tourists. "Uncontacted" is a way of saying "not my life system of capitalism and commodity markets." This use of Korowai to think about capitalist consumer culture is often explored through idealization of Korowai for making their livelihoods directly from their natural surroundings. As one French woman summed up her 2012 travel experience to me, "To live as a Korowai is to live with nothing, and you can live very well with nothing." A Dutch man in his thirties who had visited the Korowai area many times drew this contrast:

We see that there you don't need the articles we have here. There it seems it's easier to have a lot of time for socializing. And when you work for your food, you get the results of your work quickly. Whereas here you have to work a month before getting paid, and debt payments, wow, it's a totally different situation. But to live in such a way that humanity can continue in this world for thousands of years, I think everyone would have to live something like the example of Korowai people.⁷

In a sense, my statement that tourism encounters agitate participants' relation to their own normativity is merely an anthropological truism, which has also become a popular ideology of travel as cultural exchange. But there are four complicating

7. His statements were made in Indonesian, which he and I spoke a good deal during our meetings. He and his wife are unusual in having invested much effort in learning Indonesian in order to be able to organize directly their relations with their Papuan trekking crew and destination hosts, rather than working through an English-speaking guide.

ambiguities within this idea that make it more than a platitude, which I will call an ambiguity of conscious versus less conscious; an ambiguity of containment versus saturation; an ambiguity of good versus bad; and an ambiguity of plurality, or indefiniteness.

“Conscious versus less conscious” refers to the further anthropological truism that many normative frameworks go without saying, or are known by feelings more often than as objects of deliberative awareness. While tourism encounters perturb boundaries between these modes of people’s relations to their own normativity, this does not mean the encounters simply draw into propositional awareness what used to be unconscious.

This complexity can be illustrated by a private diary passage written by an English television producer who visited the Korowai area on a holiday trip with her husband, in which she reflects on the demeanor of a porter when they part with him after he has helped them across the entire time of their trek:

As he stood tall and almost blank, I realized how practical and, in our terms, neglected their upbringing is—not a criticism because he was so kind and attentive to [her husband] despite his young age—but with no toys, no music, no books, no allowance for being an adolescent he just seemed locked—or he hasn’t been unlocked. The babies are simply strapped to the hip and join in through observing the adult world, violently swaying back and forth as the sago is mulched for example. . . . [T]he four and five year olds play and chatter together but they are also, day in and day out, in the same filthy clothes and I wonder if they know that each one of them is someone special or unique, do they even know they can’t read or write because there is simply no need (no books or bureaucracy). What do I know? Absolutely nothing, because they are also masters of their universe, in their own kingdom. In the jungle—in which they walk barefoot, fell trees, make bridges, houses, river steps, kitchens, and hunt in the dark—and don’t even sweat!!—they are so successful.⁸ They are king. Not for them, the life of TVs, computers, radios, newspapers, books. . . . This is their destiny—to be raised in smoke-filled tree houses in nature. To hunt, build and repair.

The late portion of this passage again contrasts Korowai closeness to surrounding nature with tourists’ capitalist system of living through consumer electronic devices. Through this contrast she makes tacit bodily norms of bourgeois life an object of deliberative knowledge, and marks them as not in fact universal. But she does so via an initial universalizing presupposition of a very peculiar Romantic individualist teleology of personhood centered on self-realization through creative self-differentiation in childhood.

Earlier, discussing “Ewok villages” and other primitivist motifs, I was in effect saying that tourists travel a great distance only to meet not actual Korowai people but just projected versions of themselves (compare Todorov 1993: 264). Yet tourists’ experience is not *only* projective. Their focus on the concrete microcosm of

8. Pathway bridges, streamside bathing platforms, and kitchens are novel structure types that are often purpose-built for tour groups by host clanspeople or the traveling camp crew.

embodied meetings, and their valuing of what many tourists call “interactions,” are indications of their interest in sensory and social experience of forms of life that challenge their existing interpretive faculties. What I like about “agitate” as an image is that it leaves open for inquiry whether and how different levels of people’s normative frameworks are reaffirmed or destabilized.

This is the complication I referred to as an ambiguity of “saturation” versus “containment.” Academic theorists have proposed many potentially relevant models for thinking about the problem of an otherness in relation to normativity. I borrow the term “saturation” from Catholic philosopher Jean-Luc Marion’s controversial idea of a “saturated phenomenon” that systematically overruns people’s categories for knowing and narrating it (e.g., Marion 2002: 199–247). In the same vein, previous ethnographers of “first contact” histories in the Australia-colonized eastern half of New Guinea write of the “existential” aspect of these meetings, involving “the raw shock of Otherness,” amidst which people “momentarily glimpse the epistemological edges of [their] own social understandings,” leaving them in “dread and fascination” (Schieffelin and Crittenden 1991: 4).⁹ On the other hand, the “existential” or “saturated” experiences of having their normativity challenged are ones that tourists actively bring about and they do so, as we have seen, using exoticizing stereotype that may “contain” any such challenges well within other basic normative assumptions. This pattern is closer to the accounts of a projective, creative, and structuring relation between normative frameworks and what is experienced as “outside” or “against” them given in the pathbreaking models put forward in the earlier Morgan lectures of Victor Turner (1969) and Nancy Munn (1986). A central aspect of analyzing tourism, in my view, needs to be constantly taking the measure of the relative strength of saturation versus containment as features of tourists’ experience of the agitation of their own normative assumptions by Korowai otherness.

By what I called an ambiguity of good versus bad, I mean the striking evaluative volatility that participants experience in the encounters. Tourists oscillate between seeing Korowai as gods and seeing them as monsters (Stasch 2014a). The basic primitivist model is a backhanded compliment. Seeing Korowai as archaic involves celebrating their superior spiritual and ecological virtues, but it also usually implies some feelings that they might be lesser beings. There are regularly small events of interaction in which tourists focus on ways Korowai are inferior to themselves, such as their supposed guile, unreliability, violence, or cannibalism. The English diarist’s pivot from lamenting that children are creatively “locked” to celebrating their mastery of the universe is typical of a wider “pageant of evaluations” in which tourists constantly seek to judge what is better or worse between Korowai and themselves (Stasch 2011b: 14–16).

Across human societies, xenophobia is more common than xenophilia. But one simple hypothesis about both responses is that the immediacy of the feeling that the exotic other *is* horrible or *is* great reflects the transcendent, embodied character of one’s own normative commitments. If others *offend* what I am foundationally

9. Also metaphorically relevant, in Marion’s larger source tradition, is the Husserlian idea of the “bracketing” or “suspension” of normal processes of naturalization of forestructures of embodied experience (Throop 2012).

invested in, I defensively condemn them; if others positively *symbolize* in disguised form something I am invested in, I celebrate them. There are more complex theoretical models of normativity and values that can give even better accounts of why radical others attract such charged feeling.¹⁰ But even this very simple initial model helps us see that the volatile attractions and repulsions people feel toward a strange other flow from the complicated and value-laden character of what it is to live culturally and historically at all. This evaluative volatility is systematic to the exotic other's agitation of people's relation to their own normativity rather than just an accident.

The closely related last complication I listed earlier was an ambiguity of plurality or indefiniteness. Part of what makes our conditions of normativity inaccessible to ourselves is not only that we embody many of them unconsciously or in denial, but we embody such a multiplicity and huge scale of institutions and chains of events that they defy comprehension. I picked out capitalism and consumer culture as a level of tourists' lifeworld that Korowai stand for. But there are a great number of other connected levels of tourists' conditions of life that would *also* need to be researched as "agitated" in encounters with Korowai, from pursuit of prestige, to gender and sexuality, to childhood and aging, to privacy, to property, to hygiene and manners, to grand narratives of progress or apocalypse, to the complex particularity of different tourists' biographies. I would hypothesize that Korowai are so moving and attractive for tourists because they vividly draw together in a concrete object of sensory interaction such an otherwise unfocused, confusing, and vast network of conditions that tourists live within, just like all of us (Durkheim [1912] 1995).

Transcendental presence in transaction: Working socially on the otherness of others

My presentation so far has reversed the order of my own research process. There were many tour groups visiting Korowai when I began research with them in 1995, and I paid close attention to tourism in my fieldwork at that time, but I initially found it difficult to say anything insightful about this topic, and there is nothing about tourism in my Ph.D. thesis and resulting book (Stasch 2009). In later years,

10. For example, people's own orders of normativity are of course internally complex and multiple, and so an exotic other may be a detour through which to explore the liberation of some values from constraint by other ones with which they normally coexist (Bashkow 2006). So too, perhaps living by orders of normativity is itself a condition of the repression and ossification of counternormative possibilities and desires, that make norm-exceeding and norm-saturating exotic others attractive as actual "outsiders" to the dominant lines of one's own system (even if that system in effect already has such an "outside" within itself, as a dialectical shadow presence). Or, perhaps living historically and culturally is by definition living with disparities between one's actual conditions and one's orienting values, such that exotic others are a screen for experiencing something of the distance between oneself and one's own order, and what it might be like to close that distance (Robbins 2015).

not only did Korowai people's continued international media exposure make me feel obligated to try harder at studying tourism, but during my return visits I became more aware of the elaborate ideas that *Korowai* increasingly expressed about tourists. It was hearing and thinking about Korowai people's perspectives on the encounters that started giving me ideas about tourists' perspectives as well. It is to Korowai perspectives that I now wish to jump. In doing so, I seek to keep developing the same train of ideas organizing my tourist-focused remarks so far.

Korowai did not choose for tourists to be attracted to them, and so the category "ritual" might not describe their participation in the encounters as well as it describes tourists'. But for Korowai the encounters do have a larger-than-life quality. A hint of this transcendental or perhaps mythic status can be found in how strongly Korowai experience tourists as walking incarnations of a generic type, a little like how Korowai incarnate the generic type of primitive humanity in tourists' eyes. The word *tulis* in the Korowai language designates an *ethnic* group. Tourists are obviously still tourists when they go home and they probably all know each other there. Since Korowai live dispersed across the forest and tour groups trek in all different directions, talking and joking together about the tourist as a generic type is a much more common event than actually interacting with concrete tourists, which some Korowai may experience only every few years (Basso 1979; Bashkow 2006).

Prior to borrowing the word *tulis* as a way of talking about this new ethnic group, Korowai used a preexisting word meaning "zombie" (*laleo*) to talk about tourists, and all other new strangers. In their daily lives, Korowai vividly discuss the negative, fearful characteristics of this stereotyped and depersonalized zombie monster. Calling tourists by this category reflects how the experience of tourism for Korowai has been much like the imagery of a zombie apocalypse in US popular culture.¹¹

A slightly quieter way Korowai have categorized tourists as an ethnic population has been to wonder if tourists are actually a preexisting category of invisible divinities who dwell at taboo sites across the landscape in parallel to the population of Korowai themselves. In academic discussions of other cases of Native Americans or Pacific islanders linking intruding Europeans with divinities or the dead, it is often assumed that such interpretations of the intruders were admiring. But Korowai stances toward landscape divinities, like their stances toward the zombie dead, are in many ways negative and aloof. The landscape divinities are thought to be "angry" and unreliable in temperament, and the ideal relation that Korowai tried to arrange with them in their religious practices was that the invisible divinities would "turn their backsides" to living Korowai and not make them sick or otherwise interfere in their lives.

As you might infer, the reason why Korowai have experimented with categorizing tourists and other new foreigners as zombies or invisible land deities is that these new strangers so violate existing Korowai normative expectations about what people look like, what material possessions they have, and how they behave. Like

11. Trying to stay separate from this zombie monster that their own relatives become after death is one of the main reasons Korowai give for building their houses elevated above ground, for example. The houses across the landscape that look so beautiful and picturesque to tourists are actually to Korowai iconic of fear of death.

other monster and god categories cross-culturally, zombies and invisible landscape divinities for Korowai are beings at the outer limits of the human, and they are categories *about* what is resistant to stable categorization (Stasch 2014a). In other words, these god and monster figures are surrounded in Korowai thought by an aura of the agitation or saturation of what is normal, as if they expose or endanger usually hidden underpinnings of life. When outlandishly weird foreigners began intruding into Korowai lives, these preexisting ideas Korowai had about the zombie dead and landscape divinities were a good resource for trying to reason about the new strangers. I also want to emphasize, though, that even while there can be an edgy excitement surrounding these religious figures of the divine and the dead, sometimes the tenor of Korowai people's application of these categories is similar to tourist application to Korowai of categories like "Stone Age" or "tribal chief." There can be a very banal, self-protective, or non-involved quality to the application of these highly generic labels.¹²

The zombie apocalypse was a very fearful idea to Korowai, and people's first historical response to the arrival of tourists and other foreigners was to feel and say that they should stay away. Yet even those early responses of revulsion were often mixed with responses of fascination and embrace. What I want to focus on here, though, is the transition that Korowai kin networks have gone through over time, from first seeing tourists as horrifying, to intensely desiring for them to come.

At the center of that transition has been tourists' agitation specifically of Korowai normative expectations about economic life and material possessions. This is highly visible in some further features of the generic stereotype of tourists as an ethnic type that Korowai regularly refer to in their daily affairs. This stereotype does not just describe tourists as persons, but presents a kind of anthropological image of their whole collective life order in their home countries. Matching a similar pattern in other tourism destinations, the paramount characteristic of tourists as an ethnic type in Korowai eyes is possession of large quantities of money and articles.¹³ Korowai routinely refer to tourists by epithets like "people with money" (*du-mux-man-anop*) or "people with articles" (*misafi-man-anop*). The most prominent feature in Korowai exoticizing stereotype about tourists is that in their home places they live in a material utopia of unlimited wealth. Tourists' food and money is said to be "just there." As one man described the system, "There's this place where it exists all prepared. They just keep eating what's already there, and from that they all get huge."¹⁴ This is a Korowai image of capitalist consumer culture as a life system:

12. A third set of preexisting character types whom that Korowai have sometimes quietly wondered if tourists might be is a small array of stock personages populating myths, known collectively as the *waxatum-xol* or "folktale-ites." These are also notable for their highly generic imagery and names (variously the ogre, the dissolute ugly trickster elder brother, the beautiful and virtuous younger brother, the beautiful and virtuous woman), and for their diffusely understood status of living a parallel but unseen existence next to visible humans on the land.

13. For other instances of the cross-historically common perception of tourists as by definition wealthy, see, for example, Crick (1994: 133) and Causey (2003). Kincaid (1988: 18) is trenchant on wealthiness as the prime difference between "tourist" and "native."

14. *ibontop mändiptelodaxu, wa mändipfəxa lelemoxombate xongexongetale wafip*

an image of pantries, refrigerators, ATM machines, and box stores loaded with consumer goods for people who had no direct hand in making them.¹⁵ The stereotype is partly based on study of tourists' actual food consumption during visits, and the huge quantities of articles they travel with. It is also based on Korowai knowledge of the economics of consumption in town settings, and their projection of an inverted antitype to their self-image of having to make their daily livelihood through strenuous labor, as in one man's statement "Humans [i.e. Korowai] always go down and around searching for game, and kill it and climb up and eat it. Zombie foreigners' food is there wholly prepared, and they are always sitting just eating on and on what's already there. They [i.e. Korowai] keep on saying, 'We ourselves should live like that, let's eat food that is already there.'"¹⁶

There are loose parallels here with tourists' experience of Korowai otherness. I referred earlier to a felt coherence across the different sensations tourists have of norms being exceeded in their experience of the trips. So too the mythic status of tourists for Korowai draws strength from feelings of consistency across all perceived or imagined elements of tourists' lives, from their big size, strange hair, or clumsy movements to their bizarre technological repertoire and the imagined idea of faraway cities as spaces of unlimited consumption and total coverage of the land surface by concrete and metal. Like tourists too, Korowai mix in negative emotions and evaluations right alongside positive idealization of the exotic other's utopian life. For example, imagery of cities as tourists' home space of endless consumer goods is mixed in also with imagery of these cities as full of the monstrous dead. Or as one woman more plainly described her feelings about seeing tourists who were at a local feast site, "It's one side fear and one side pleasure" (*menpe gelon menpe six*).

The most obvious parallel with tourists' exoticization of Korowai is that both groups are centrally wrestling with the contrast between capitalist consumer culture versus gardening and gift exchange as economic systems. And both imagine

15. In the wider genre of statements along these lines, the idea of something being "just there" is signified by either of two words, *xondüp* and *mäsip*, that can be more elaborately translated as "quality of being already available for the taking and consumption, without any effort on the part of the beneficiary." Building on these terms, Korowai routinely say things like "[tourists] go on eating what's just already there," "Their food is just there," "They take what's there already prepared," "They are people who live by eating what's just already there," or "They get money that is already there." The word *mäsip* also occurs frequently in Korowai speech carrying two other meanings: "again, next, some more" or "entirely, all, wholly." The specialized sense of this term as describing limitless ready-made wealth seems to be colored and supported by these broader senses. Bilingual Korowai sometimes calque the statements about tourists eating food that is "just there" by the succinct Indonesian expression *tambah makan* ("eat again, eat some more"). Combining "just there" with another internally complex word meaning "spot where something lies" (*ibontop*), Korowai also often refer to a "fount of wealth, fount of plenty, place where it exists all prepared" (*ibontop mäsip*), which they understand to be present in tourists' home place as the source of their material provisions.

16. *yanop, yexenep lunga bilaine waijaxaimatedaxu unelulelembate. se laleo-alin yexenep lunga ibodo sendip babomatedaxu mofu mäsendip lelembate. noxupa wofäxa ülop ibobalexu läfen didimbate.*

the grass is greener on the other side. Each sees the other as living an unalienated life of seamless integration with their material surroundings: Korowai make their livelihoods from surrounding nature, and tourists have immediate access to all commodities they could want.

The desire most Korowai now feel for tourists to come visit is not only a matter of experiencing the *idea* of tourists' economic system, but actually getting practical access to it. Korowai like tourists because they can get money and manufactured consumer goods from them. In metropolitan marketized social worlds, we have a ready story that explains what is going on in such a situation, a story of the universal if tragic appeal of easy consumption and of getting ahead by money, which washes away preexisting values. In the remainder of this lecture I want to suggest that that story is not quite right. An area of Korowai people's relation to their own normativity that is being "agitated" in encounter with tourists is their expectations of what quantities of material wealth it is possible to have, how material life can be organized, and what scales of material inequality can exist between themselves and other people. There has been a much wider pattern across the New Guinea region and in many other settings worldwide of local populations having their prior expectations about their own worth and their place in social hierarchies dramatically challenged and overturned by interaction with new colonizers' wealth and power (e.g., Robbins and Wardlow 2005; classically, Fanon 1967). Concerning Korowai experience, I want to suggest that it is not large accumulations of wealth as such, or the idea of living from readymade goods without effort, that is the ultimate strongest transcendent presence in the tourist image. Rather, problems of *equality* and relational *position* raised by wealth are the deep issue. The normative complex that is most basically "agitated" by tourism encounters is Korowai people's focus on equality as a valued state of social relations, and their focus on the possession and giving of material valuables as the paramount site of where people know their relations. I will refer loosely to this overall approach to social life as "egalitarian transactionality." Equality is the goal and transacting is the method. Anthropologists have been trafficking in generalizations like this about societies of the New Guinea region for a hundred years. But it is by giving some examples of Korowai transaction-focused responses to tourists that I want to move in the direction of what I referred to at the outset as working socially on encountered people's otherness: in other words, seeking situations where those others' unexpected actions are something one tries to accommodate and meet halfway in one's own actions.

One striking expression of Korowai idealization of tourists is that about a hundred Korowai children have been named after the professional tour guides who bring tour groups to the area. Some of these guides originate from other parts of Papua, some are from other parts of Indonesia, and some are from tourists' own home countries in Europe and elsewhere.¹⁷ But what the guides have in common is, first, that they are emblematic of tourists' stereotyped social order of the urban commodity paradise; but, second, that unlike tourists, who stay generic, the guides are recognizable individuals with whom Korowai have actual transaction-based

17. All Papuan and Indonesian guides who accompany tour groups to the Korowai area are male, though Papuan woman occasionally come with tour groups as cooks. It is usually male children who are named after male guides.

social relations. The guides come repetitively, and they speak Indonesian, which some Korowai also speak as a second language. The guides are also the people in the tour groups who actually pay money and other articles to Korowai for their labor and hospitality.

Children are the focus of intense feelings of value and hope. Since tour guides are figures of beauty and value with whom Korowai want to be transactionally linked, naming children after guides resonates with how people feel about children and what they want for them in their lives. But here parents are also using the otherness of generational difference as a key for trying to unlock the distance between Korowai and urban society. They draw attention to the otherness between themselves and the children they raise, likening their own child to something as foreign as a tour guide. But this is also a gesture of hoping that one's relation to the child might be a path for getting closer to the foreign economic order.¹⁸

The money and other articles guides actually pay to Korowai are not something tourists themselves always know about. Korowai, by contrast, attribute to tourists a focus on these payments that speaks volumes about Korowai people's own transaction-led approach to social relations generally. Very often when individual Korowai are asked why it is that tourists come to visit their land in the first place, they say that tourists' central goal is to "divide out articles" (*misafi bantungalxe*). More specifically, they say that tourists have heard that Korowai live without money and articles, and so out of love and pity (*finop*) they come to divide out these things to them. As one woman described tourists' reasoning: "We live here empty handed, and so they say 'You people are without articles,' and they come divide out to us."¹⁹

Tourists actually do love, admire, and desire Korowai because of their material condition. Absence of clothing and other imported manufactures is the single most emblematic feature of Korowai life that tourists scan for on their trips and that concretely anchors the larger primitivist imagery of a tribal condition of stasis, violence, spirituality, or unity with nature. But for tourists, paying money or giving articles to Korowai is not the natural sequitur to that love. If they do know about the payments, or are even involved in making them, they tend to think of this as a regrettable aspect of the meetings.

In Korowai kinship, people explicitly say they know a relative's love by articles he or she gives. A prototypic kinship act is for one person to be lacking in articles, and another to be moved by love to give what is lacked. The Korowai interpretation of tourists' motives I just described further naturalizes an egalitarian norm according to which inequality is a call to relatedness.²⁰ Korowai attribute to tourists a subjectivity of egalitarian compassion for those without articles, and they attribute to them a positive valuing of commodities and their equal distribution

18. There is perhaps an echo here of the experimental sometimes-identification of tourists with "taboo place divinities," in construing what appears to be radically strange and distant from oneself as actually local and autochthonous.

19. *noxufe mbimbəlop xaməledo gexenep misafialinanop datedaxu bantemate*.

20. This understanding of a disparity of material well-being as being a call to relatedness is somewhat akin to Ferguson's account of the positive relational value of "declarations of dependence" in southern Africa (2015: 141–64).

in the making of bonds. This “containing” application of egalitarian interpretive assumptions occurs alongside the “saturation” experience of finding tourists’ wealth overwhelming.

The same point can be drawn from a Korowai pattern of routine use of a specific word in their language also to describe tourists’ motives. The word is *xənil*, and means “unfamiliar,” “inexperienced,” “new,” or “very first.” This word is the main term Korowai use to translate tourists’ descriptions of Korowai as “uncontacted” when tour guides explain that idea. Korowai quote tourists as thinking, “Let’s see an unfamiliar old guy,” “Let’s see unfamiliar people,” “Let’s see unfamiliar houses,” and so on. But when Korowai describe tourists as coming to see them because Korowai are “unfamiliar,” the emphasis is on *tourists’* subjectivity. Tourists are the ones who have never had a certain experience.

It makes sense to Korowai that something being “unfamiliar” would be a reason to go seek it out. They often narrate their own experiences in these terms, including participation in tourism, as when one woman told me she was happy a certain tour group was on its way because this meant she was “going to see some unfamiliar people.”

This framework dehierarchizes what tourists make hierarchical. When tourists describe Korowai as “uncontacted,” the overt emphasis is on Korowai: being uncontacted is their condition. In Korowai discourse, it is tourists who are uncontacted, so to speak. The tourists want to have an experience of being in contact with what they have not experienced before. What is absent is any hierarchical, evolutionary idea of Korowai or other “uncontacted” people as an archaic human condition, and tourists’ condition as the endpoint of human history.

The normative complex of egalitarian transactionality is something Korowai try to apply to tourists *practically* too. As one woman described hopes toward tourists for exchange:

When bright-skin people first came, people were scared and took off. Now they say, “What will we give?” If we get money, we’ll be happy. If we bring them produce and they buy it, then the sellers do a happy dance [*xobūlangi*]. If they don’t buy, they shrug it off and eat it themselves. Tourists have a lot of money, so they buy all manner of food. They go on setting out huge amounts of food [to eat].

This response of “What will we give?” reflects an idea that the appropriate reaction to an encounter with people possessing material wealth is to try to get into the transactional stream with them. And that is what Korowai have most actively been doing in their current enthusiastically protourism era, by providing all manner of labor for the physical logistics of tour groups’ treks and for exhibitionary performance of emblematic cultural activities.

In actual meetings with tourists, Korowai are not always happy with the transactional outcomes and they do not always just “shrug off” their disappointments. There are many kinds of practical actions by which people sometimes try to press for better outcomes, or practical ways they live with feelings of unfair treatment. But as a last glimpse into this general field of Korowai egalitarian normative reasoning, I will quote a long commentary by an experienced tourism worker named Fenelun:

You Zombies are coming to us Korowai people's land, and you look at us and look at us. You tourists are joyfully coming and photographing over and over our articles, our bodies, our land: tall houses, bows and arrows, string bags and fiber skirts, big garden clearings, penis-covering leaves and rattan waistbands, bodies with sweaty grime. . . . And then elsewhere with your people you keep getting big money. If we are going to do your bidding, then you should give us money, you should give us steel axes and machetes. If we do it that way, then we'll give to the relatives . . . , and then the problem will be resolved. And that big uproar of that woman's relatives [due to a man having married her] will disappear. [People will say] "Those are our Zombies, we think they're great." If things are done in that manner, we are very content. Whereas not doing it in that manner, but instead you only looking at our bodies and our articles and taking off, and then elsewhere having a happy time getting your own articles and your own money, that's really unpleasant. [In the better approach, the tourists,] they'll come from elsewhere, and the person-dying uproar, the girl-taking uproar [we just had], the pig-killing uproar, searching for money for our children's schooling: when you have just come, and you hear about that uproar, if you give money for that, it's good. Everyone is saying: "You don't come here because our place is bad. You come because it is good."

One pattern we glimpse in this commentary that runs contrary to tourists' ideas is that commodification of human life has a long-established place in Korowai social relations, at least in the form of using payment to deal with deaths, marriages, pig thefts, and other crises. But at the center of Fenelun's reasoning here is his case for transactional symmetry between tourists and Korowai. He narrates the voyeurism at the center of tourists' actions, but his critique of voyeurism is not of its possible intrinsically objectifying effects. What he criticizes is refusal to match the pleasure taken in looking with egalitarian sharing of tourists' money and material resources. He projects an ideal of tourists and Korowai being subject to a single transactional standard rather than being members of two different systems. A main rhetorical path by which he lobbies for that common standard is to locate relations between Korowai and tourists squarely within the tumult of relations between Korowai and other Korowai. He envisions drawing tourists into Korowai people's troubles among themselves, and into responsibility for those troubles' resolution.

In this way, Fenelun's commentary is representative of one main point I have been seeking to make through my discussion of Korowai perspectives, which is that to the degree Korowai social order is being remade through tourism into a more deeply commodified system of life, integrated with large-scale market structures of tourists' home social worlds, a crucial factor in this remaking has been the egalitarian transactional sensibilities that Korowai bring to the encounters. These egalitarian normative logics are different from tourists' ways of thinking about wealth, virtue, and social relations, but they give Korowai bases for being interested in tourists, and for seeking to meet them transactionally in a new middle ground of performance and exchange.

Yet there is also a second and broader point that I would like to draw from Korowai perspectives on the encounters, with which I will end. I have already suggested that Korowai categories like "zombie" or "unfamiliar" (*xenil*) are paradoxical

in being normative structures *about* what is likely to be unexpected and challenging to normative expectations. In this sense, they are categories that in their application are likely always to be straddling the ambiguity of saturation and containment. In an analogous way, egalitarian transactionality as an overall approach to relating to other people is a bit like a monster category. Fenelun in his discourse about exchange *expects* other people, whether Korowai or tourists, to be out of alignment with each other around such issues as whether there is an imperative of equality between them, and what it would take to achieve it. People often enter exchange arenas concerned to *persuade* others to act toward them in one normative framework and not another, or concerned to jointly achieve a stabilized new definition of the order between them (Munn 1986; Keane 1997).

Concerning my original question of what makes tourism encounters larger than life and attractive for participants, I suggested earlier for the case of tourists that it is because the encounters put people in contact with the transcendental, not only in the form of exoticizing stereotypes of gods or monsters at the extremes of human time, space, and morality, but also in the related form of agitating people's relations to the givens of their own historical condition, ambiguously both drawing them outside some of those givens and deepening their naturalized investment in others. I would not want my heuristic of three modes of heightened attention to otherness to impose an artificially unitary account on both tourists and Korowai experiences. But Korowai too seem to experience tourists as larger than life because of their agitation of Korowai relations to their own normative expectations, such as those about wealth and equality. Yet this agitation does not only happen thanks to who the tourists *are*, such as their possession of wealth. Agitation also occurs through what the tourists *do* with Korowai in interaction. Korowai desire tourism meetings because tourists have amazing wealth, which is something Korowai value. But they also desire tourism meetings because the existence of this wealth agitates Korowai egalitarianism, creating problems of how to realize an egalitarian norm in relation to the new strangers or how to adapt normative expectations to accommodate their existence. Encounters with tourists are attractive not only as a way to get money, but also as offering a chance to work *socially* on the otherness of the tourists and the problems they pose for Korowai normative expectations. There seems to be a hope that in practical interaction of being affected by others' norm-breaking acts or presenting one's own normative assertions toward them in turn, people could actually accomplish new forms of coordination, or better reconcile their normative expectations with the problems those others present.

If there is something to that point, it could also be relevant to the second orienting question I raised at the beginning, concerning *how* the encounters take place in relatively smooth and valued ways even though the participants have very different understandings of who they each are, and what their relationship is.

One answer to that puzzle is that it is just a coincidence that there is a smooth, blind meshing of gears between tourists' exoticizing stereotypy about Korowai, and Korowai ways of assimilating who tourists are into their own category systems. Each side is able to successfully get what they want from the other, while unaware of the mental gulf between them.

Another answer might emphasize that the success of the tourism meetings reflects the difference-bypassing power of the commodity form. People feel all sorts



of things to be going on in their relation with others, but payment-based relating is the thin element that actually makes the process work.

Both of those answers are probably true, but I would like to add the further suggestion that participants' ability to coordinate benefits from ways they come to their meetings not only bearing stabilized stereotypes they project onto the others, but also bearing latent expectations that their own categorizing frameworks will not be smoothly adequate to everything encountered. People often seem in these interactions to know a little more about each other and about the conditions of their meeting than their stereotypes most prominently say. There are half-formed understandings in the background of the prominent stereotypes that are also important to how coordination is achieved. Tourists and Korowai encountering each other may actively seek out practical interaction with others that focuses on the difficulty of assimilating what each does. They may feel that these *practical* situations of trying to get along *socially* with strangers draw forth skills for cognizing and engaging with otherness that are not as available when thinking of strangers at arm's length.

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