

*The Asaro Mudmen: Local Property,
Public Culture?*

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APPARITIONS OF THE MUDMEN

Who has not seen a picture or even a film segment featuring ghastly figures covered with mud and wearing artfully crafted, grotesque masks of clay, who emerge from the bushes making strange movements and holding spears in their hands? Most likely it was a manifestation of the Asaro Mudmen from the Eastern Highlands Province in Papua New Guinea or one of their imitators. Apparitions of these mud-covered figures occur in the most diverse contexts. Within Papua New Guinea one may encounter images of Asaro Mudmen in various commercial settings. Whether in a newspaper, on a billboard, in a brochure, or on television, mudmen can be seen driving a Toyota, enjoying a can of Pepsi, or merely being themselves as an indication of what one may find during a “weekend retreat to the cool Highlands” (Figure 1).

The use of the Asaro Mudmen as an evocative symbol has not been restricted to Papua New Guinea. A commercial on Australian television showed mudmen drinking a can of orange soda and a Benetton Tribú perfume commercial that was aired throughout Europe in 1993 also provided a glimpse of the mudmen. This Benetton commercial showed distinctive cultural emblems for countries all over the world, such as the jumping Masai from Kenya and the bobbies from Great Britain. The Asaro Mudmen were chosen as a characteristic symbol of Papua New Guinea. In the British *Independent on Sunday* (23 April 1995) a full two-page advertisement featured four mudmen in rugged terrain surrounding a four-wheel-drive vehicle. The accompanying text read, “Mudmen from Papua New Guinea get their first glimpse of a Frontera, thanks to its powerful new engine and anti-clog brakes” (Figure 2).¹

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 H/O/L/I/D/A/Y/S/C/L/O/S/E/T/O/H/O/M/E

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to the Cool
Highlands**



**Bird of Paradise
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2 Nights from K178*

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Enjoy a weekend or long-weekend retreat, staying at the Bird of Paradise Hotel in Goroka. Prices include return airfares from Port Moresby, twin share accommodation and airport transfers. Also included are transfers to and from Goroka Golf Club and entrance to Goroka Fitness and Aerobic Centre. Goroka packages are also available from Rabaul.



Air Niugini

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT AIR NIUGINI OR YOUR TRAVEL AGENT
 * Per Person. Special conditions apply to airfares, accommodation and availability.

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FIGURE 1. An advertisement for a short holiday. (*Times of Papua New Guinea*, 2 July 1992, 5)



FIGURE 2. A two-page car advertisement. (*The Independent on Sunday*, 23 April 1995, 28–29)

The mudmen have also been adopted by the competitive world of “pop-culture,” where the immediate strong impact of images is an important aspect of sales strategies. This is especially evident in the techno and house music movement of the late eighties and early nineties: the covers of compilation compact disks containing music from this genre are in general graced by scantily clad females, monsters from horror movies, rabid dogs, and recently also by the Asaro Mudmen (Figure 3).²

This is not the first time the Asaro Mudmen have been connected with music-recording products. They were embraced by the music industry as far back as 1972, when Pink Floyd recorded a track called Mudmen and

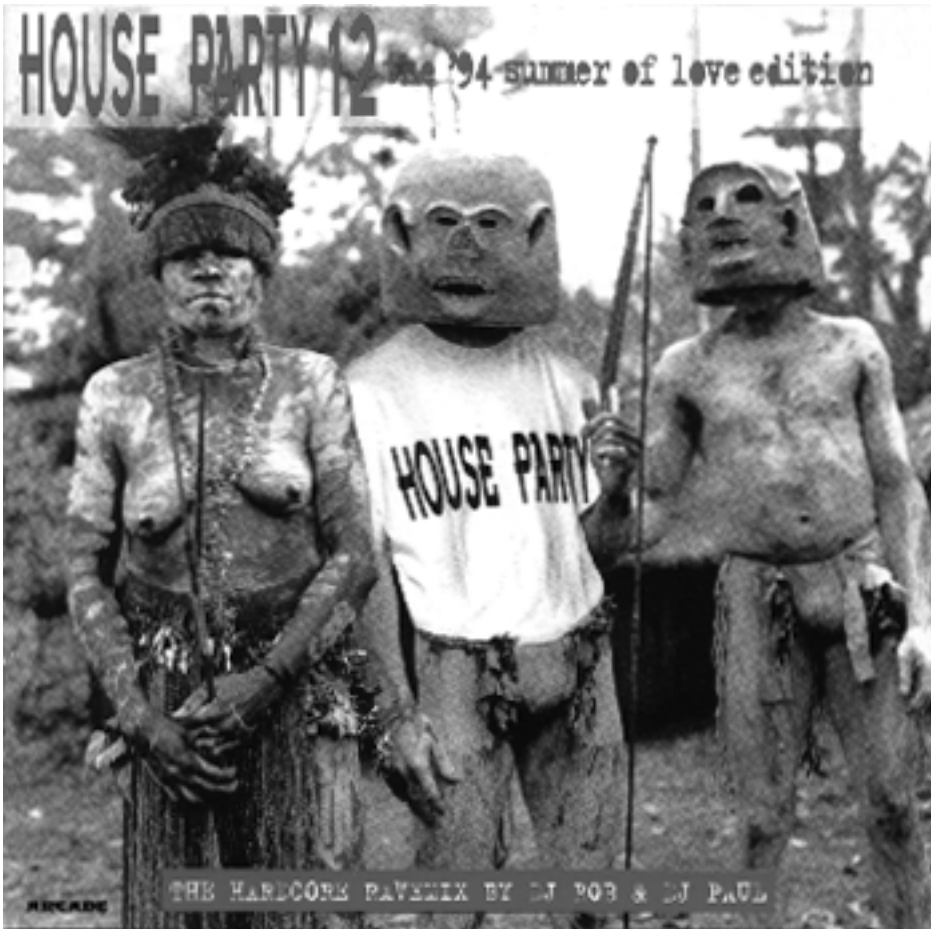


FIGURE 3. The cover of a compact disk containing house music. (Photo by Mike van den Toorn)

included a photograph of them on the back cover of their long-playing record, *Obscured by Clouds*. In 1994 the politically aware band Killing Joke used a mudman image in their fast-paced black-and-white “pandemonium” video, built up of striking photographs from all over the world.

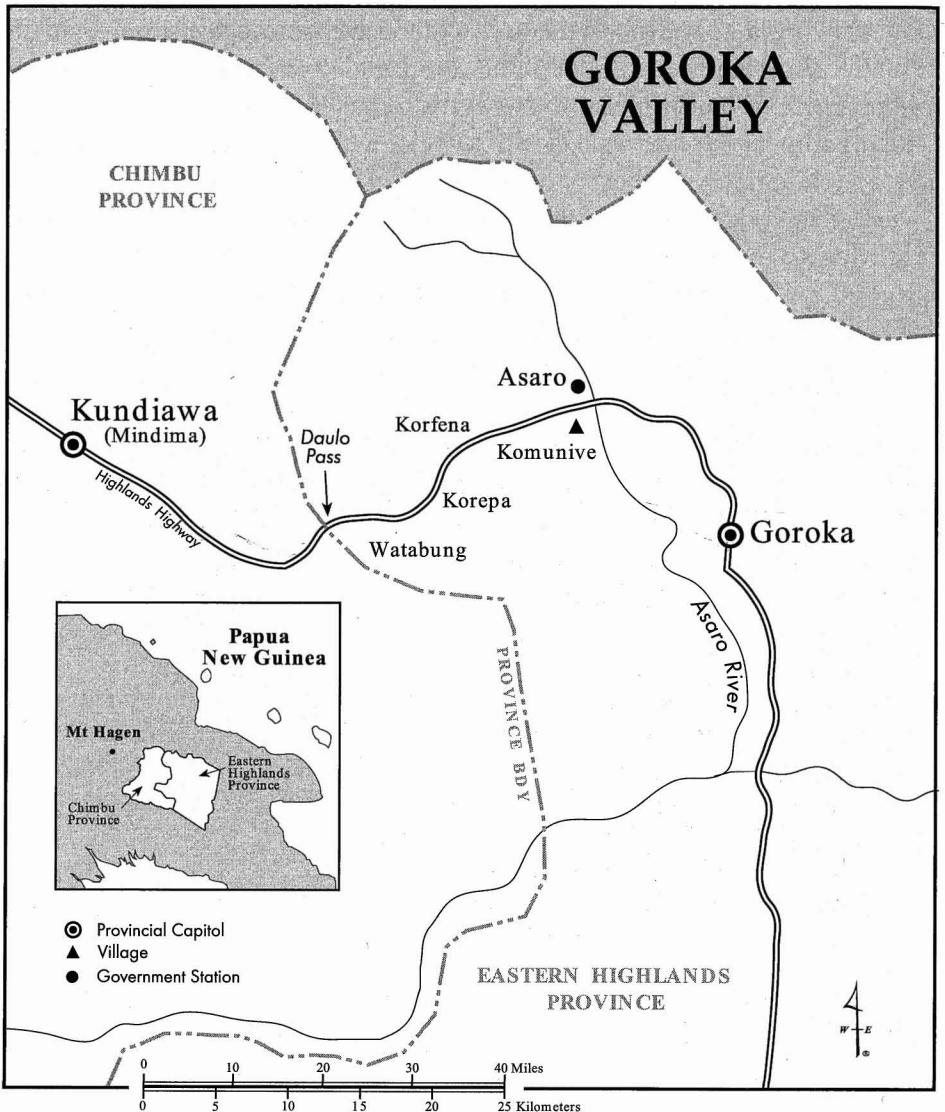
The film industry has also flirted with the exotic mudman image. The Pink Floyd record contains the background music to the movie *La Vallée*, directed by Barbet Schroeder, which featured Asaro Mudmen. We remember viewing a romantic black-and-white adventure epic, situated in the Pacific, showing the ritual exploits of an undetermined tribe, who in the appearance of their ritual dress resembled the Asaro Mudmen. The Dutch horror film *The Johnsons* tells the story of a chain of events set in motion by an ethnographer’s expedition to a fictional tribe in the Amazon region where the Indians wear mud masks in certain rituals. These masks are identical to the one worn by an Asaro Mudman in a picture taken by Kirk (1986, 79). A quote from the film reads, “Hey the mud masks, oh no no, once they are disguised as such, anything goes” (our translation).³

Most travel guides and popular books pertaining to Papua New Guinea and the Pacific area mention the existence of the “legendary” Asaro Mudmen but usually the reference includes little more than a photograph and a short recital of the Asaro Mudmen legend. There are as many versions of this legend as there are sources, but they mostly agree on a few key elements.⁴ A typical rendering can be found in the Papua New Guinea volume of the richly illustrated and “serious” German series Dumont Kultur-Reiseführer:

During one of the many tribal fights, the inhabitants of Asaro came off worst. The survivors saved themselves on the muddy banks of the river, where they hid until nightfall. When they, completely covered with light mud, tried to sneak away quietly, they were observed by the enemy, who thought they were the avenging ghosts of the killed. The enemy panicked and fled. The Asaro, surprised by the effect of their unintentional make-up, developed it as a war strategy, a kind of psychological warfare, and created mudmasks. (Wesemann 1985, 263; our translation)

In some versions it is emphasized that the mudmen exercised a reign of terror over their neighbors, killing “thousands of people” (Cousteau and Richards 1989, 85). As with any legend, this tale about the origin of the mudmen phenomenon has to be taken with a grain of salt as a factual representation of historical events. Noteworthy is that the narrative con-

tains elements of surprise, trickery, warfare, death, and ghostly apparitions, images that appeal to an indigenous audience as well as to tourists. Some western narrators have not stopped at recounting a legendary origin story and have contributed to the exoticization of the phenomenon by accompanying mudmen pictures with statements like, “The Asaro Mudmen not only represent the demon, they also try to become master of its



MAP 1. Goroka Valley (after Sexton 1980, 2).

mysterious powers” (Jones 1978, 143; our translation), or “The Asaro valley people wear mud masks when they dance to destroy possession” (Tausie 1979, 35).⁵

In the next section we present a less fantastic but nevertheless fascinating version of the history of the Asaro Mudmen practice. The main body of the story was collected from Ruipo Okoroho, the proclaimed big-man of Komunive and acknowledged “chairman” of the Asaro Mudmen. Komunive is a village located some twenty kilometers west of Goroka along the highlands highway (Map 1). It lies in the Asaro Valley and its 320 inhabitants speak the Asaro language, together with some fourteen thousand other people in the region (Sexton 1980, 14). Komunive is the birthplace of the mudmen and the geographical locus of this internationalized symbol.

THE HISTORY OF A TRADITION

Many years ago, probably in the 1880s or 1890s,⁶ Bukiro Pote, the grandfather of Ruipo Okoroho, left his village of Kabiufa⁷ to live in the Watabung area for two to three years. Here he learned many new practices, one of which was *bakime*. If one were to exact revenge on a neighboring villager, it would have been unwise to do so undisguised, because one could easily have been targeted for a reprisal. The people of the Watabung area devised a method to avoid being recognized. They would cover their faces with white sap extracted from the *meniha* tree and then execute their ambush in the safety of anonymity.

When Bukiro Pote returned to his village he transformed the original *bakime* idea into what he called *girituwai*. Bukiro’s *girituwai* construction entailed the smearing of mud over a bamboo-and-*bilum* (looped string bag) frame, which fitted snugly over the head. Holes were cut in the *bilum* to facilitate vision. We can only speculate about the reason for the transition from tree sap to mud: it may have been the result of an observed preferable quality, or of necessity because the original resource was not readily available. What transpired in Bukiro’s mind we cannot know, but his exploits, as passed on through the generations that followed, tell of repercussive strikes, in the guise of *girituwai*, undertaken in conjunction with his brother Didiso. Later other villagers also adopted the practice of *girituwai*. According to the villagers of Komunive, the use of *girituwai* was only for such acts as assassination and not for full-

fledged warfare, during which it was pertinent that a man be dressed in his finest.

The practice of *girituwai* should not be viewed as an isolated phenomenon: similar practices are found throughout the highlands. In Mount Hagen, for instance, men would blacken their entire bodies with charcoal when heading out to battle in order to disguise themselves and to make themselves look more formidable. This practice was associated with beneficial ancestral ghosts who would accompany the warriors during combat (Strathern and Strathern 1971, 101–102). A similar warfare technique was practiced by the Wahgi people (O'Hanlon 1989, 89).⁸

Smearing clay or mud on the surface of the body and face is a much-used expression of grief in the highlands. This manner of mourning the dead can be found in other places in the Asaro Valley and in Mount Hagen (Strathern and Strathern 1971, 33–34). In past times the Mount Hagen warriors would even return to battle covered in yellow and orange mourning clay to avenge the death of their fellow combatants. Another example that resembles the *girituwai* practice is the “trampling the fence” ritual of the Wahgi people; during it a small group of people covered in white clay and wearing rough masks run wildly to and fro waving bunches of nettle-like plants to clear a path through the audience. They are said to be imitating the spirits (O'Hanlon 1989, 106). The themes that emerge from these examples are related to those of the mudmen story: concealment, ghost-like appearance, mourning, and revenge.

In 1957 Ruipo Okoroho was approached by organizers of the first Eastern Highlands Agricultural Show⁹ and asked to display an aspect of his peoples' heritage in the form of a *singsing* (dance) group for the tribal finery contest. Ruipo remembered the tales of his grandfather's exploits and thought it would be a good idea to rejuvenate the old practice of *girituwai*.

Ruipo and his elder brother Luhupo held a feast and invited all the important men of the Asaro area. On that occasion Ruipo told them convincingly of his plan. His proposal was accepted, which is no small feat given that the Asaro were locally respected for their fine and colorful traditional *singsing* dress. Alterations were made to Bukiro's brainchild. The *girituwai* masks, which before had only the function of hiding the face, now became small works of sculptural art, exhibiting facial features and expressions. Furthermore the entire body was covered in white clay. This

can be seen as the next step in the dynamic process of developing the mudmen practice.

It is said that two hundred disguised Asaro villagers marched into Goroka that year, hounding a pack of frightened people before them. When they finally reached the playground where the agricultural show was held, presently called the National Park, they were responsible for quite a commotion, causing grown men to step back and small children to cry. The intimidating *girituwai* from Asaro were named the 1957 first-prize winners and went on to win the tribal finery contests of the two following agricultural shows. These events, and especially the spectacular march into town, when Papua New Guineans and expatriates alike fled from the ghostly appearance of the mudmen, are far more important for the building of legends about the Asaro than any presumed battle from the past. One of the other competing tribes, the Ifi Yufa, made up a song, which they gave to the Asaro. It tells of the fear all felt when first sighting the *holosa*, a name, chosen to describe the masked men, that means ghosts in the Asaro language.

The villagers of Komunive had a new name for their “construction,” *holosa*, and a new story to accompany it, one that tells of the flight of the masses because of their eerie appearance. To accord with this new name, a suitable movement was developed. Though the dance, if one may call it that, is far from elaborate, it required a minimum of creativity. The movements are slow, because the legs of a mudman are said to be broken, having the brittleness of postmortem bones. Leaves are held, and used to make swatting movements to scare off imaginary flies attracted by the rotting flesh (Miller 1983, 103–105). The element of revenge is maintained in the threatening manner in which weapons are held.

Although neighboring tribes had dubbed them the *holosa*, the expatriates and tourists called them the mudmen. So popular were they that it was only logical that possibilities were sought to further exploit their invention. Until 1964 one could only enjoy the sight of the Asaro Mudmen at the agricultural show, but from that year onward tours were organized to Komunive. Ruipo Okoroho had appointed himself chairman of the mudmen and functioned as a middleman between them and the tourist agencies, an arrangement that enabled him to accumulate considerable wealth. Many tourists came and still come to see the Asaro Mudmen, but peak years were during the seventies, when the demand for mudmen performances was so high that men from the village of Kenitisaro were asked

to participate also. Today all official mudmen tours are organized by the Bird of Paradise Hotel in Goroka, which has strong ties with Air Niugini.

A mudmen tour, at 50 kina per person, consists of a drive up to the top of the Dauilo Pass to view the beautiful Asaro Valley, accompanied by the offering of a flower garland by some local people. Then the bus heads back to Komunive, where a number of mudmen emerge from the bushes according to a ratio of roughly one mudman per tourist. The mudmen walk slowly toward the tourists, making their dance-like movements, an act that lasts a couple of minutes, ensuring enough time to take a fair number of photographs (Figure 4). Afterward the tourists are given the opportunity to take those memorable photos that always break the ice at the coffee table, such classics as “Grandma the Mudman.”

Innovations to the mudmen experience were added from the outset. They include traditional fire making, via friction and dry grass, and a bow-and-arrow-shooting competition that is always heavily attended, not only by the mudman performers but also by other villagers who appreciate the notion of an easily pocketed two kina, which is the prize for the



FIGURE 4. A typical mudmen performance in Komunive village. (Photo by Nick de Heer)

person who first hits the bull's eye. We suspect that the popularized version of the Asaro Mudmen legend took shape during this beginning period.¹⁰ One can imagine that interested parties such as tourist agencies wanted to sell their product, the Asaro Mudmen; how better than to package it in a tale that refers to such practices as tribal warfare, belief in ghosts, and adornment of the body with natural products, and complies with western preconceptions of "primitive man."

Because many of the themes in the mudmen story resonate with practices common in the Papua New Guinea Highlands, we assume that the legend was created in a fragmentary dialogue between villagers and visitors, between producers, distributors, and consumers of the mudmen performance. In this process the development of dance movements was also involved. Once the legend—and accompanying performance—was created, its further elaboration most probably followed a path similar to that of a message in the children's game Chinese Whispers or Gossip.¹¹ Various tourist guides quoted each other with some liberty, and tourists and agents brought the latest versions back to the assumed originators.

The Asaro mud mask has also undergone a variety of changes over the years, partly under the influence of outsiders. In the early seventies, the bamboo-and-*bilum* frame was exchanged for the root of a banana tree. These roots would be dug up and smoothed with a sharp stone, giving the mud masks a nice round shape that was better appreciated by the tourists according to the villagers of Komunive. However, because digging out a banana root is a time-consuming activity, in the late seventies the last major change was made when it was decided to use only clay in the construction of the mud mask. A slight problem entailed by this last method of construction is the weight of a mud mask, which is some two centimeters thick. It is also hot and muggy, causing performers to keep the masks on for five consecutive minutes at most.

In the past the facial features of the mud masks were made to be threatening. Eyebrows were raised and mouths were made growling (Strathern 1990, 56–58), but less scary masks are better received by tourists, and now many mud masks show off their beautiful smiles. The preference of the tourists is also the driving factor behind the adherence to white clay. We conclude that the role of the consumers has affected the dynamics of the material transformation of the Asaro Mudmen attire.

The mudmen tradition is undeniably an Asaro invention, but its emergence and development are the unplanned result of numerous interactions

among Asaro people, government administrators, tour operators, writers, and tourists. In this light it is justifiable to consider the mudmen an intercultural phenomenon rather than a purely Asaro one.

A MATTER OF COPYRIGHT

It has long been known that many so-called tribal societies have concepts of ownership pertaining to nonmaterial or intellectual goods (Lowie 1921; Malinowski 1922). With regard to the Siane in the Eastern Highlands Province, Salisbury discerned forms of ownership pertaining to incorporeal property such as pigs' souls, certain kinds of designs, ritual knowledge, and rights to make speeches (1962, 61). Sexton observed that in the Asaro region such forms of incorporeal property have lost their value following the demise of traditional religious rituals (1980, 60). Another example from the wider region can be found in O'Hanlon (1993), where the author explained how many elements of the important Pig Festival were acquired by Wahgi groups from their eastern neighbors. An interesting development and possible parallel to the mudmen situation occurred during O'Hanlon's revisit to the area, when he was praised for having produced a book on Wahgi styles of decoration, because this book would enable the people to demand copyright payments from other groups copying their cultural styles to coax money from tourists.

To what extent modern forms of copyright are a transformation of earlier practices in a process of adaptation to western commodity relations is a fascinating question that we cannot pursue further here. Harrison has recently addressed these issues in a comparative perspective and shown how certain western conceptual dichotomies such as those between wealth and knowledge, between things and ideas, between persons and things, and, fundamentally, between economy and religion, complicate an adequate analysis of Melanesian concepts of "ownership" and exchange (1992, 1993a).¹² The treatment of ritual representations as a form of property or wealth is widespread if not universal in Melanesia, but the extent to which this form of immaterial wealth is exchanged within and between societies varies considerably.

It is likely that intellectual property was traded in the Asaro region as in neighboring areas; however in the case of the mudmen the claimed copyright appears to serve mainly as a means to prevent others from obtaining this lucrative business and points to a commoditized version of

the concept of copyright. In accordance with Harrison's observations, the ownership of the mudmen is not really a fixed proposition, like a registered patent, but a contested issue connected with relations of power. The battlefield in which the contestants meet is more often than not the courtroom or a village assembly.

If the Asaro Mudmen performance is considered a commodity, its copyright is claimed by Ruipo Okoroho, the big-man of Komunive—an interesting perspective if one contemplates the fact that the image of the mudmen can be found in a multitude of different communicational vehicles throughout the world. Most creators who are lucky enough to have a copyrighted invention of theirs receive this scale of attention would move into a Hollywood villa next door to Jim Davis, the mind behind Garfield. Of course matters are not that simple, and for a nonwestern man who deals with people from the western world, in considerably unequal terms, Ruipo Okoroho has not done badly for himself.

To the members of other villages in the vicinity, it is as though Ruipo has struck gold for himself and his village. Therefore it is not strange that his claim to ownership of the mudmen has been contested on various occasions. In 1980 he appeared before a local court to defend his rights to the mudmen practice. The people of Korepa felt they were entitled to it. Ruipo emerged victorious, but only a few years later he once more faced allegations of deceit, this time by Gehiro, the big-man of the Korfena area. Again the big-man of Komunive held the better cards. However, in 1987 Ruipo was taken to court by a man from Watabung who told the local court that Bukiro, Ruipo's grandfather, came to live with his (grand) father in Watabung and learned the practice there. Ruipo countered by contending that *bakime* belongs to the people of Watabung and that Bukiro devised *girituwai*, which is different. One of Ruipo's strongest points of defense was apparently that he, together with the people of Komunive, had introduced the mudmen many years earlier to Goroka and later Port Moresby, Hagen, Lae, Sydney, and New York. Which argument proved decisive is not certain, but Ruipo won the last of a series of court battles concerning the mudmen practice.

Today another court case beckons. While watching Australian television, Jane Wilson, Ruipo's daughter who lives in Australia, discovered that mudmen shows were staged for tourists in Chimbu Province near the capital town of Kundiawa. She contacted her father and advised him to resolve the matter. Ruipo sent Atairo Kanisuwo, the second most influen-

tial man in Komunive, to investigate. When Atairo reached the village of Mindima, he saw a large Asaro Mudmen sign on the side of the highway. He told the villagers of Mindima to take down the sign and stop their mudmen performances or he would take them to court. According to Ruipo, the mudmen practice has been officially named a possession of the Eastern Highlands Province (Goroka district), and he himself is the appointed proprietor, so it may indeed be possible for him to put a stop to the bold moves of the Mindima villagers.

In Mindima is a so-called tourist center that was started in 1962 and offers over twelve different performances for tourists, one of which is *gambagumane*, which was introduced in 1975. *Gambagumane* means mud nose. The clay used has a greenish tone and is smeared over the entire body, except for the midsection, which is covered by a breechcloth (called *maro* in highlands Tok Pisin). The mask, which is larger than the Asaro construction, is covered with fresh mud to give it a wet appearance. Pointed shards of bamboo are placed over the fingers, with which a clicking sound is made. The dance is a purposely estranging stop-start happening. Although it is speculative on our part, we believe that the Mindima people started their mudmen performances after realizing the financial potential of the Asaro practice. When we inquired into the origin of their mudmen practice, their big-man responded with an unconvincingly told version of what can be read in the travel guides. It is therefore likely that we can speak of another transformation of the mudmen practice (Figure 5).

Likewise in the Korfena area, in the village of Kofoyufa, are the villagers who introduced their Kuku frog dance at the 1988 Goroka Show. Unlike the Mindima, they do not have arrangements to perform for tourists, but perform solely at the Goroka Show, where they cover their bodies in greyish mud, wearing a *maro* and pointed bamboo sticks on their fingers. Their faces are hidden behind mud masks, shaped in the form of frog heads and constructed on the inside with the help of bamboo and *bilum*, reminiscent of the manner employed in making *girituwai*. Their dance consists of no more than hopping around like frogs. Interestingly, the villagers of Komunive have no quarrel with the frogmen from Korfena. They find the frog dance so different from their own that they consider it original. However, we assume that this is yet another transformation of the mudmen practice. The Goroka Show, where several new creations saw the light of day—including the mudmen, the frogmen, *singsing* groups on stilts, and those with burning



FIGURE 5. A Mindima Mudman filmed by one of the authors. (Photo by Nick de Heer)

coconut shells on their heads—must be regarded as a competitive arena for cultural creativity and an important dynamic force in ongoing processes of cultural transformation.

THE OWNERSHIP of the mudmen is challenged not only in the wider region, but also locally, where Ruipo has to defend his claim to be the main proprietor of the practice. His main contender is the very same Atairo who acted as his representative with regard to the Mindima imitation. Atairo insists that he was responsible for the transition from banana-root masks to clay-only masks, and therefore feels he should share in the spoils gained from the mudmen practice. Furthermore, he has made some minor changes to the mud masks, such as the addition of a brush-like decoration and two feathers to the top half of the clay construct. At the time of fieldwork he had six of these masks already com-

pleted in his garden shed, and more were in the works. He confided that he had supporters who were willing to perform for him and his *holosa*.¹³ Atairo would not reveal the names of his supporters, though he did let it be known that they were younger men. He did not want Ruipo to find out who sided with him, fearing that the big-man would dissuade his fledgling followers from lending their support to him. Atairo planned to introduce his *holosa* at the 1994 Goroka Show.¹⁴

Most villagers of Komunive regard the mudmen practice essentially as a good source of income even though it does not constitute a noteworthy contribution to the average villager's purse. The regular mudmen performers all stem from a select group of men who share close affinity with the big-man Ruipo. Most are members of the Gavina clan, which is the most important clan in Komunive. A mudman performer earns three kina per performance. The sale of artifacts is hypothetically a better source of income. The sale of mud masks, little mudmen, bows and arrows, and *bilums* to tourists raises opportunities for all villagers to earn some money. However, not many tourists are inclined to buy the souvenirs, and as a result there is only a small group of regular vendors. Moreover, Ruipo appears to want to monopolize the sale of artifacts as well. There is an artifacts store on the terrain where the mudmen shows are staged. The big-man takes a percentage of the profits from the sales of these souvenirs.

Apart from an avenue to cash income, the mudmen custom is also something the villagers are proud of. They are generally pleased to show this aspect of their heritage to the tourists and receive satisfaction from the fame of their cultural "product." The biennial Goroka Show is considered a high point because the mudmen performance receives maximal exposure and public recognition. In newspaper announcements the "famous Asaro Mudmen" are always mentioned as one of the highlights, whereas other performing groups often remain unnamed. The mudmen dancers are well aware of their renown, which appears to enhance the gratification they receive from the public display of their collective identity. Preparations for the show occupy the minds and conversations of the villagers in the months preceding the event. During feasts in the village, the mudmen song is a popular item on the program.

In more mundane circumstances the mudmen are used as a marker of collective identity. Talking to strangers an Asaro person will often say: "I am from Komunive" or "I am an Asaro," immediately followed by "You

know, from the mudmen!” Non-Asaro people equally use the mudmen label to refer to the villagers and sometimes add that the success of their performance has made them smug and bigheaded. Although the mudmen represent a group identity, the practice itself allows for the expression of individuality. Every dancer has his own unique style of making the mud mask, which is readily recognized and respected by the other performers. In communication with outsiders, the mudmen phenomenon is primarily a vehicle for expressing collective pride and group identification, but within the Asaro community both collective and individual identities are possible connotations.

Interestingly, most villagers are not inclined to talk about the origin of the mudmen practice, respecting the right to recount the origin story as a privilege of its proprietor. Harrison used the term “intellectual property” to describe the ownership of immaterial things such as stories and rituals. Specific groups or individuals may own the exclusive rights to recite, perform, or organize them (Harrison 1992, 235). In the case of the mudmen, a performance may not be staged without the big-man’s consent, and for the legend of origin one is also referred to Ruipo. However, it is incorrect to assume that mudmen performances are never organized by the villagers of Komunive without the big-man’s consent. In practice, most villagers, even close kin of the big-man, seize every opportunity to earn some money from a mudmen performance without Ruipo’s knowledge, for example during his absence.

Ruipo Okoroho, who is referred to as the big-man of Komunive and also as the “chairman” of the Asaro Mudmen, certainly has the most to gain from the practice. Apart from the ten kina he receives for every performance staged, he has received certain amounts for licensing as well as the opportunity to travel to Sydney in 1969. Clad in his mudman attire he opened a new office building in the Australian city along with Michael Somare, the former prime minister of Papua New Guinea. Furthermore Ruipo’s ownership of the mudmen, which he has bitterly defended, has a political function. The control over this economic resource has greatly helped the maintenance of his position as big-man in Komunive. Conversely, Ruipo’s bigmanship has helped him to remain chairman of the Asaro Mudmen, a position that is not fixed (Figure 6).

In November 1993 a mudmen meeting of fifty members of the Gavina clan was held. With fifty votes in his favor, Ruipo was unanimously chosen to prolong his chairmanship. Kapisaro, the man recommended by



FIGURE 6. Ruipo Okoroho, chairman of the mudmen, distributing money to his clients. (Photo by Nick de Heer)

Ruipo for the secondary position, received fifteen votes and lost out to Atairo, who thereby remained vice-chairman with twenty-five votes. It is clear that there is friction between Ruipo and Atairo and that Ruipo's influence is not great enough to be rid of this thorn in his side.¹⁵ Atairo Kanisuwo, Ruipo's likely successor, after years of partial collaboration has lost patience and is using more overt and aggressive tactics to undermine the big-man's hegemony. He plans to introduce his *holosa* to compete with Ruipo and has also harassed the manager of the Bird of Paradise Hotel with weekly naggings demanding pay increase and commanding that the manager send the tourists to his domain and not Ruipo's. Before this situation developed Atairo was one of the main promoters of the Asaro Mudmen. Ruipo had chosen him to travel to New York on invitation to show the mudmen practice in the late seventies. Furthermore, Atairo was the voice behind the text in *Cousteau's Papua New Guinea Journey* (Cousteau and Richards 1989) and in *Paradise*, the Air Niugini in-flight magazine (Kanisuwu 1991).

LEVELS OF DISCOURSE, CONTEXTS OF MEANING

We began our exposition of the mudmen phenomenon by illustrating various discursive contexts in which the mudmen have made an appearance, from pop music to tourist guides. In this section we identify four major discursive fields and discuss some of their most salient characteristics.

In the first place the mudmen constitute a local cultural practice with a local history and local forms of ownership attached to it, as we have described. At this level the mudmen function as a form of objectified tradition, an expressive symbol of identity that, according to context, has individual, local, and even regional referents.¹⁶ For Ruipo—and for his competitors—the practice is a cultural property derived from the ancestors and crucial to his present identity, status, and wealth. Individual performers may relish the possibility of expressing themselves in the particulars of the masks, but for Komunive villagers the mudmen function mainly as an emblem for their collective identity and a much-valued source of additional income. The principles that regulate the control over this resource are local conceptions of copyright. There may be considerable struggle for control over the mudmen as cultural property, but this does not affect its effectiveness as a symbol of local identity.¹⁷

Around the Asaro area the mudmen are being used as an emblem of ethnic difference and regional identity. Masks can be found in the principal's office of the National Sports Institute and the boardroom of the Capital Authority office, both in Goroka, and in the middle of the magistrate's table in the courthouse at Asaro station. Mud masks also serve as decorations in many stores and food bars, including those in Goroka. Outside the council house at Asaro station a large sign, which gives the size of the area and the population of the Asaro-Watabung district, is adorned with pictures of mudmen.

During a royal visit by Prince Edward to the 1992 Goroka Show, the spectacular welcoming entourage assembled at the airport included the Asaro Mudmen. During the official welcome Prince Edward was presented with a *bilum*, a spear, coffee, honey, and an Asaro mud mask. In April 1994 a new hospital was opened in Kundiawa. Tribal groups from around the area were contracted to contribute to the festivities of the official opening ceremony. The Asaro Mudmen from the neighboring Eastern Highlands Province were invited to be present. The Mindima Mudmen,

no more than ten minutes removed, were not invited, substantiating the claim that the Asaro Mudmen are recognized as the true proprietors of the practice.

In line with recent research on the invention and objectification of tradition, the mudmen performance can be viewed as a ritualized celebration of custom in the form of dance and traditional dress, dramatically enacted during cultural shows. These shows are examples of the elites of the new Pacific ritually affirming—to themselves, the tourists, the village voters—that their ancestral heritage lives on (Keesing 1989, 23). At the 1990 Goroka Show, Governor General Sir Serei Eri, Eastern Highlands Province Premier Walter Nombe, and Minister for Police (and regional member for the Eastern Highlands Province) Mathias Ijape all gave speeches. Among other things, Nombe stated, “The customs of our ancestors live on and we the people of Papua New Guinea can be proud of this fact.” Following Nombe with a heartfelt speech, Ijape concluded, “Today after fifteen years we have proved to the world that Papua New Guinea is a unique country.”

Large public performances of “tradition” today are staged mainly for entertainment purposes in the context of special events, such as the Goroka Show, aimed at tourists as well as the entire population (Flinn 1993, 560). They are also part and parcel of the program during official gatherings such as church jubilees and Independence Day celebrations, where they are expected to contribute to the central sentiment being conveyed, be it religious redemption or national identity.¹⁸ The cultural performances are prestigious and usually competitive. The participants do not strive to give an “authentic” representation of traditional culture—originality and innovation are often more valued. However, they contribute to the construction of a general idea, which is shared by European and Melanesian alike, of what “traditional” New Guineans looked like (Schwartz 1993, 519).

As a relatively new nation-state, Papua New Guinea is in the process of establishing a national culture.¹⁹ The mudmen practice may well have a role in this development. The creation of nations necessarily involves the identification of some characteristics or criteria that function to exclude outsiders and to “primordialize” insiders (Brow 1990, 5; Geertz 1963). The intentional national culture-making activity undertaken by elites includes the conscious writing of national histories, the construction of national folk symbols and rituals, and the revitalization of various tradi-

tional identities (Appadurai and Breckenridge 1988, 7). As Foster (1991, 252) has succinctly pointed out, nations and national cultures are artifacts: continually imagined (Anderson 1991), invented (Hobsbawn and Ranger 1983), contested (Errington 1989), and transformed (as with the mudmen practice) by the agencies of individual persons, state organizations, and the global community of producers and consumers.

In the process of creating a national culture, virtually any product under certain conditions can function as a vehicle for objectifying the nation, be it something like goulash for the Hungarians, as Kisbán (1989) mentioned, or betelnut, or perhaps even the mudmen for the Papua New Guineans. Whatever the object, more often than not a struggle is connected with its recognition as a national symbol. For instance, goulash was not the first dish the Hungarians elevated to the status of a symbol of and for themselves. In the seventeenth century this position was held by sauerkraut with meat (Kisbán 1989, 95). Furthermore, because the creation of a national culture is most often not without political contest, objects from certain areas are more likely to form the basis of national symbols than objects from other areas. Such is the case in Indonesia where preferential treatment is given to commodities from central Java (Errington 1989, 50).

The mudmen phenomenon is certainly a serious candidate for the status of national symbol—next to already established symbols such as the bird of paradise (on the national flag), the kina shell (as the national currency), and, recently, Michael Somare—Papua New Guinea's first prime minister (on the fifty-kina note). The mudmen hold good cards because their symbolic value can be employed in different contexts. As a performance of (national) tradition they can function during official celebrations of statehood and national unity, while as a marketable commodity they may earn much-needed cash for the country while providing an expressive emblem to the outside world. Through their public performances as well as frequent use in advertisements for other products, the mudmen-as-a-commodity have become an image with a high circulation value, providing a vehicle for imagining a common national identity. Foster observed that “advertisements, circulated through the mass media of newspapers, television, radio, and videos, can expose large numbers of people from a cross-section of social categories to images of a national life-style” (1991, 250). A text from a recent advertisement for land cruisers may illustrate this:

The Mudmen of Asaro Valley are known throughout Papua New Guinea for their unique and mysterious ways . . .

Toyota Land Cruiser is equally well-known for its reliability and performance Nationwide. (Figure 7)

The processes through which a localized custom may acquire the status of a national symbol obviously need further study. Even already established national emblems of different kinds, such as the bird of paradise (a local species), the kina shell (a traditional valuable), and Michael Somare (a historical figure), retain some of their regional connotations (Clark, in press). We have suggested that the mudmen may perform the function of an emblematic tradition symbolizing the continuing strength and richness of the ancestral heritage; the importance of this heritage is engraved in the first lines of the preamble to the national constitution. But, of course, there are many colorful customs that could assume this role of traditional symbol of nationhood. We believe, however, that a number of characteristics make the mudmen stand out in this crowd of contenders, and these characteristics point to mechanisms on which further research could focus. In the first place the mudmen phenomenon has a high degree of distinctiveness. The practice is virtually unique²⁰ and easily recognized and remembered among countless traditional dances, all with delightful feathers and paints. In addition, the mudmen image enjoys a high level of circulation because of its popularity with tourist spectators and its adoption by the advertising industry. Finally, the mudmen have already gained some international recognition as a typical practice of Papua New Guinea, as suggested by the Benetton and Frontera advertisements and confirmed by conversations we had in the Netherlands and elsewhere. The example of Dutch tulips and wooden shoes suggests that the success of a national symbol may depend as much on its international appeal as on its value as an emblem of national identification.

As will be clear now, the function of the mudmen phenomenon as a possible national symbol and even as a local emblem of identity cannot be understood in isolation from its appeal as a tourist attraction. Nevertheless the mudmen as an export product for tourists deserves separate discussion because it operates in a different discursive context, the third one we want to distinguish. From this angle, the Asaro Mudmen performance can be placed in the general category of tourist art,²¹ a category that to date has been treated harshly by most anthropological studies. Tourist art



FIGURE 7. A Toyota advertisement taken from the back cover of the Air Niugini in-flight magazine. (*Paradise* 89, November–December 1991; photo by Gerry Peacock, Ela Motors, Papua New Guinea)

is usually seen merely as an economic commodity or as an indicator of cultural change or loss, though it may play a complex and important role in the development of a society (Webb 1994, 81). In the tourist art business expatriate entrepreneurs and local agents share a joint interest in maintaining visions of primitivism and exoticism.²² These spurious images are economic commodities that can be a good source of income (Otto 1993, 13) and the mudmen performance can be said to be commoditized and packaged as exoticism for tourists (Keesing 1989, 32). Some would even call the mudmen show a tourist trap²³ that, as Webb put it, caters to tourists' expectations of the exotic (Webb 1994, 75).

The Papua New Guinea Tourism Office, in conjunction with Air Niugini, has concentrated efforts to promote Papua New Guinea and especially the highlands as the home of the mudmen. They have also emphasized other aspects of Papua New Guinean cultures, but the mudmen practice has received special attention. The mudmen have traveled all over Papua New Guinea, visiting Port Moresby, Mount Hagen, Lae, and other places, their expenses paid by various sponsors. Ruipo has visited Sydney, and Atairo has flown to New York, both some twenty years ago.

A more recent example stems from early 1993, when the now-deceased Henry Sibuno made a promotional tour of Australia. In four days, as the focal point of the first travel industry road show, Sibuno visited Brisbane, Melbourne, Sydney, and Cairns, publicizing holidays in Papua New Guinea (Figure 8). This road show was organized by Air Niugini to give representatives of the Papua New Guinea travel industry the opportunity to meet their Australian counterparts. According to a description of the event in Air Niugini's in-flight magazine *Sibuno*, as an Asaro Mudman, presented to Australia "an example of the sort of different culture that visitors and tourists to PNG could expect" (Brooksbank 1993, 13). Sibuno made four Australian television appearances and generated a great deal of publicity for the road show in the continent's newspapers. The road show was the start of an aggressive campaign by Air Niugini and the publicity it attracted gave a major boost to the airline's attempt to awaken potential Australian tourists to the many possibilities that Papua New Guinea has to offer as a holiday destination.²⁴

Mudmen have also traveled to other parts of the world, including Europe. In one case known to us, not the Asaro Mudmen but their Mindima competitors made the tour.²⁵ We doubt that the organizers were aware of this substitution but, if they were, the Asaro people were wisely



FIGURE 8. Henry Sibuno during a promotional tour in Australia. (*Paradise* 98, May–June 1993, 14; photo by Mike Coutts in an article by John Brooksbank)

kept in ignorance. In line with their primary function as an exotic attraction, information about Asaro Mudmen in the western press has been riddled with speculation, half-truths, and incorrect data. For instance, if one were to look up the village name where the Asaro Mudmen practice originated, one could find Kiminivi (Derrick 1973, 90), Asaro village (Wesemann 1985, 263), Komiufa (Wheeler 1988, 163), Komuniva (Cousteau and Richards 1989, 85), and Komonibi (Brooksbank 1993, 12). Admittedly it is petty to make an issue of a village name—and we do not want to imply that we present the “true” or definitive story—but it does illustrate the freedom scribes have adopted when writing on the mudmen.

The “strange” and “bizarre” Asaro Mudmen have been, one might say,

almost artificially preserved in their ambiguous state to facilitate continued fantastical fabrications by the western world.²⁶ In trying to understand the appeal of the mudmen, it is worth contemplating what tourists wish to find in so-called primitive countries. Errington and Gewertz have given this theme some thought (1989; see also Gewertz and Errington 1991, 34–45). They discovered that a certain category of tourists—the (mostly) young and not (yet) wealthy travelers—were motivated to undertake their individual and sometimes arduous journeys because “the encounter with what is seen as the ‘primitive’—the exotic, the whole, the fundamentally human—contributed to their own individuality, integration and authenticity” (Errington and Gewertz 1989, 42). These travelers sought a primordial and unspoiled society and lamented any change deriving from western contact. Another type of tourist—older and professionally successful, and traveling in luxury on board the *Melanesian Explorer*—also wanted to see the “primitive” but considered modernization inevitable and necessary. What they wished for themselves was a glimpse of a not yet (greatly) changed world before it disappeared forever.²⁷

With regard to the mudmen, the image of “primitiveness” appears to play an important role—as is expressed in the reiteration of the legend of origin in travel guides. This was confirmed in casual conversations with tourists who considered the mudmen phenomenon preeminently primitive, at least in origin. In addition, some mentioned their gruesome appearance, whereas others were amused by their slow-motion movements. An important motivation to see the mudmen was the fame of the phenomenon and its easy accessibility through organized tours. As visitors are often warned by travel guides that the phenomenon has already been commercialized to some extent, the mudmen appear to appeal predominantly to a category of tourists who value some convenience in their encounter with the exotic. The other category of tourists distinguished by Errington and Gewertz, those in search of primordial and authentic experiences—if they decided to make the tour to Komunive at all—expressed great disappointment when they realized that the phenomenon was primarily a tourist attraction.

It is possible that tourists interpret, in the mudmen’s imagined relation with mud, a truly primordial bond between humans and earth.²⁸ Other aspects that appear to thrill western minds are references to (primitive) violence and to apparitions of the dead. Perhaps the use of masks is an important ingredient of the mudmen’s lasting success. It refers to a pseudo-

reality, a theatrical performance that is frightening but at the same time innocent (remember the appearance of smiles on a number of the mud masks). Also, the element of legendary trickery may be a theme with wide appeal.²⁹ A proper assessment of western emotive connotations concerning the mudmen phenomenon would require further analysis of texts and advertisements as well as extensive interviewing of tourists and other consumers of the mudmen image. What we want to stress here is that whatever the principal meanings involved, they have proved extremely successful.

In the discursive sphere of the international tourist industry, local, national, and international agents cooperate to create and maintain an image that is salable. The taste of potential consumers of the cultural product is an essential factor in determining its shape. We have shown how certain transformations of the mudmen practice must be related to this influence. Although at this level of discourse the reach of the symbol extends far beyond the local community of producers, they still have an important role to play. Tourist agents need not only an image but also a performance, and are therefore dependent on the villagers. These agents may look for competitive prices, but they also have an interest in maintaining good relations with the local population. Therefore they will be inclined to deal respectfully with local claims to ownership.

It may be evident that even in the wide-ranging discourses of nationhood and international tourism, the mudmen phenomenon retains some of its localized aspects. In national discourse, for example, the mudmen-as-symbol may refer simultaneously to the larger and to a more regional community, depending on context. In tourist promotion, the mudmen retain a geographical locus as a tourist destination. At the fourth level of discourse we distinguish, the international advertising industry, this aspect of locality loses its importance. In the global traffic of marketable images, the mudmen become detached from their locality—sometimes even from their country of origin. What counts is the evocative value of the image in fashionable contexts in which indicators of exotic, primitive, or even wild places are needed. Because these places serve merely as vehicles for the imagination, the exact origin and location of the images becomes irrelevant. Conversely, for the originators of the mudmen image, this level of discourse is also irrelevant at present, because they are unlikely to use Benetton perfume, to drive a Frontera, or to buy a compact disk by Killing Joke. This may change, however.

CONCLUSION

In the preceding sections we have discussed various aspects of the Asaro Mudmen as a local cultural practice and as a widely circulating cultural symbol. What emerges is a fascinating view of the way in which a single signifier assumes multifaceted and multilevel meanings in public culture, which may be understood as the arena in which diverse discourses interact and different cultural forms shape each other (Appadurai and Breckenridge 1988). The cultural complexity is considerable, because the mudmen function in different discourses with different values, rules, and agents, while simultaneously these discourses influence each other. We have distinguished four types of discourse at different levels of extension: local, national, international, and transnational (or global). Within, and between, these different discourses the "social life" of the mudmen unfolds as a localized cultural copyright and an internationalized public symbol.

Although the different discourses in which the mudmen figure as a symbol may profitably be distinguished, these discourses do not operate in isolation. As already mentioned the mudmen's success as a tourist attraction has certainly enlarged its potential as a national symbol. The national and international fame of their creation installs pride in the Asaro people and enhances its appeal as a symbol of regional identity. In addition western objectification of and fascination with the phenomenon has helped to "create" the tradition and has been the driving force behind its rise from relative obscurity, as a fairly recent local innovation, to the limelight, as a potential national symbol. The fourth level of discourse, the international commerce of images, appears to be relatively independent of the other contexts. However, the success of the image in this field may feed back into the others; it may, for example, inspire enterprising tourists to search for the origin of the image in order to have a firsthand experience of the "authentic" phenomenon.

In this article we have used two different approaches. In the sections on the origin of the mudmen tradition and the question of cultural copyright our description has been based mainly on ethnographic inquiry into local practices and histories. In the last section, on levels of discourse, this ethnographic approach has given way to a more textual analysis, which has allowed us to sketch the contours of four discursive fields with different semiotic characteristics. Whereas the first approach classically belongs to anthropology, the second approach is more often practiced in what has

become known as cultural studies. That these perspectives may be advantageously combined can be demonstrated by the questions that remain to be investigated. How exactly are the mudmen images received at various levels of discourse? What are the perceptions and understandings of the consumers? What are the intentions and conceptions of the various kinds of producers? And, importantly, in what specific ways do the different discursive fields feed into each other? These mutual entanglements are often realized through concrete interactions, such as the situation when Jane Wilson called Ruipo from Australia to inform him about the Mindima competitors, or when a tourist communicates his disappointed expectations to a mudman performer.

We hope this article will open up a fifth discursive field pertaining to the mudmen, that of academic discussion. Like the other types, this level of discourse does not exist in isolation. It may have some effect in other contexts, for instance if this article is read by Asaro villagers and used to consolidate or enforce cultural copyrights.³⁰ Like the cases of Jane Wilson watching the mudmen on television and the tourist reading about them, this example illustrates that the various levels of discourse do not influence each other through personal interactions only; the mass media form powerful communicative vehicles that exponentially extend the possible networks through which images of the mudmen may be circulated, also in the local context. This is a challenging field of research, which requires an interdisciplinary approach. In anticipation of such an academic discourse on the mudmen and related phenomena we hope to have convinced readers of at least one thing: whether as a local copyright, a potential national symbol, an international tourist product, or a global marketable image, the mudmen certainly deserve serious study, which has so far been lacking.

* * *

THE ORIGINAL fieldwork on which this article is based was conducted during the first four months of 1994 by Nick de Heer and Robert J Verloop as preliminary research to a video-film that was shot during the same period. The authors wish to express their debt of gratitude to Michael O'Hanlon and Chris Gregory as well as to the two anonymous readers of The Contemporary Pacific for incisive comments on earlier drafts of this paper. A first draft was presented during the Basel conference of the European Society for Oceanists in December 1994. We thank the participants in the workshop on Identity of Objects—Objects of Identity for their comments and questions.

Notes

1 We are indebted to Michael O'Hanlon for providing this advertisement.

2 The compact disk in question is *House Party 12: The '94 Summer of Love Edition* by Arcade, which was heavily publicized on television during the northern summer of 1994.

3 Another example is the film *Creatures the World Forgot*, produced by Don Chaffey in 1971, which shows two warring prehistoric tribes, one of them in typical mudmen attire.

4 References to the Asaro Mudmen can be found in Brooksbank 1993; Cousteau and Richards 1989; Derrick 1973; Harrer 1990; Holdsworth 1989; Jones 1978; Kanisuwu 1991; Kielich 1978; Kirk 1986; Miller 1983; Strathern 1990; Tausie 1979; Wesemann 1985; and Wheeler 1988.

5 As Parkin has noted, "fetishization, demonization and fantasization is as much a feature of 'full' commodity consuming cultures as emergent ones" (1993, 97).

6 This estimate is based on genealogical data.

7 Oral evidence suggests that inhabitants of Kabiufa village led by Okoroho Bukiro, the son of Bukiro Pote and father of Ruipo Okoroho, defeated the villagers of Komunive and settled in the subjected village, attaining distinguished positions.

8 Harrison pointed to a psychological aspect of covering up in warfare when he concluded that "it is specifically *groups* that are hostile, while individuals themselves are sociable. In order to fight, men must mask themselves behind a collective identity and transmute themselves, by means of self-decoration, from individuals into depersonalised refractions of a group" (1993b, 114).

9 Agricultural shows were introduced by the administration in other districts as well. Their aim was to enhance "the social cohesion of the area" and to stimulate "interest in native agriculture and handicrafts" (Manus District Annual Report 1956-57). Toward the end of the 1960s the colonial government became more concerned with the "appreciation of traditional indigenous culture" and "the growth of a distinctive national cultural identity" (Otto 1991, 236). The Eastern Highlands Agricultural Show was succeeded by the Goroka Show, which is held every second year and has grown into one of the greatest tourist attractions of Papua New Guinea.

10 An early version of the origin story contains a reference to both the ghost-disguise as a warfare strategy and the agricultural show contest: "The origins of the mud-dance are uncertain. In Kiminive [sic] they say it stems from a famous stratagem in their past. Hard pressed by a stronger enemy, they decided that their only hope was to disguise themselves as ghosts. Covered in grey mud and wearing mud-masks to hide their human features, they advanced. It worked: the enemy

panicked, ran and were massacred. But according to a less romantic version, the mud-dance ritual was devised in order to win a tribal finery contest at the 1960 [sic] Agricultural Show at the nearby town of Goroka. The truth may be a mixture of the two" (Derrick 1973, 90). The reference to the show is absent from later versions.

11 Sitting in a circle each child whispers a message to their nearest neighbor in one direction. The result is often a considerable transformation and elaboration of the original message.

12 See also Otto (1992) where similar conceptual problems are reported in the analysis of Melanesian cargo cults.

13 To avoid the possibility of being prosecuted, Atairo had decided it would be better to choose a name other than the mudmen and reverted back to the former and local name of *holosa*.

14 Another villager, who shall remain nameless, was planning to exploit the mudmen practice himself. He contested Ruipo's hegemony and Ruipo's version of the mudmen history. His story states that Ruipo and his ancestors were not originally from Komunive but from the nearby village of Kabiufa. Ruipo's ancestors had defeated the villagers of Komunive and taken over. It was not Bukiro but a true Komunive villager who had returned from Watabung with *girituwai*.

15 Another subject that was voted on at this mudmen meeting was the ownership of the mudmen clay. The recognized clay-ground owners prior to the meeting were Inaho Koniho and Henry Sibuno. These clay-ground owners receive one kina per person per mudmen performance in exchange for the use of the white clay found on their respective pieces of land, which are located along Kiaboka River, a tributary of the Asaro River. Wiyo, on whose land the white clay can also be found, was unanimously voted in as a new clay supplier for mudmen purposes. It was decided that two suppliers were more than enough and that one of the two previously recognized clay-ground owners would lose his function. Inaho received twenty-seven votes and Henry fifteen. Inaho was the man who had formally recommended Ruipo for chairmanship and this healthy relationship was probably decisive.

16 There is an extensive literature on the objectification and invention of tradition. Several aspects of the conscious use of an "objectified" image of the mudmen will be discussed later. Relevant references concerning the objectification of tradition in the Pacific are Keesing and Tonkinson (1982), Babadzan (1988), Keesing (1989), Linnekin and Poyer (1990), Jolly and Thomas (1992), Thomas (1992), Friedman (1992), and White and Lindstrom (1993).

17 Compare Harrison: "A community staging one of its important ceremonies may, at one level, be expressing its sense of identity and unity, but often this is only outwardly so, and the performance may in fact be preceded by intense power-struggles among its organisers. These behind-the-scenes or sometimes open dis-

putes are public tests of the political support each contestant can muster" (1992, 225). This scenario seems applicable to the "power-struggle" between Ruipo Okoroho and Atairo Kanisuwo, discussed here.

18 During the Goroka Show in 1995, special emphasis was given to the fact that it coincided with the twentieth anniversary of national independence on 16 September, implying that the cultural show contributed to the celebration of independent nationhood.

19 See Hirsch (1990), Foster (1992; 1995), and Thomas and Otto (in press).

20 Philippe Erikson pointed out that the Brazilian Matis also make mud masks, be it in completely different contexts. Within their wider region the Matis are the only group using clay for their masks (Erikson 1990, 60).

21 Tourist art forms are especially subject to change and decay because they are dependent on the ever-changing tastes of tourists (Webb 1994, 81).

22 Melanesia is presented in the tourist industry as a rugged and scenic area populated by "primitive" people (or "nature people" as German and Dutch tongues would have it) who have only just left the Stone Age (Bakel, Borsboom, and Dagmar 1986, 11).

23 People, particularly professional anthropologists and curators, have characterized the Polynesian Cultural Center in Hawai'i in this fashion (Webb 1994, 59).

24 The article concerned (Brooksbank 1993) created the impression that Australians are not familiar with the mudmen, but as we mentioned earlier the mudmen are featured in certain television commercials on the Australian channels. Moreover, not insinuating that Australians and New Zealanders are one and the same but hinting at a geographic proximity, we were told that back home everyone knew Papua New Guinea for two things, rugby and the mudmen, this by a young lady from the All-Blacks' country.

25 This was a tour to Europe made by a small group of Mindima Mudmen in 1990. The trip was organized by the Cultural Cooperation organization. The Mindima Mudmen, along with other dance groups, performed at cultural events in such capitals as Paris, London, and Amsterdam (O'Hanlon 1993, 56). We do not think it completely unlikely that they were invited by the European organization under the assumption that they were the famous Asaro Mudmen. The accompanying tour pamphlet stated that "The dance of the 'Mud men' comes from the Asaro Valley peoples of the Eastern highlands." The—unavoidable—version of the legend of origin is an interesting variation on the well-known theme in which clearly non-Asaro elements are incorporated. We smile when we picture the situation of "sophisticated audiences" gaping at the sight of their image of "primitive man" come to life, while "primitive man" cannot believe that he has been flown around the world, all expenses paid, for impersonating his rivals from across the Daulo Pass.

26 Clifford and Marcus have examined the role of anthropologists as profes-

sional cultural fabricators (1986). At least prior to this article, anthropologists had little to do with the fabrications pertaining to the Asaro Mudmen.

27 See the delightful documentary film *Cannibal Tours* by Dennis O'Rourke, which points to similar motivations of tourists.

28 The 1981 French-Canadian movie production *Quest for Fire* is considered a serious attempt to portray the prehistoric period. It features scenes with mud-coated Neanderthal men, some of whom also wear masks, though not mud masks.

29 We are grateful to Chris Gregory for making us aware of the ambiguous and therefore potent meanings potentially connected with the use of masks and with the legendary story of deceit. Such ambiguous meanings may also play an important role in the popularity of the symbol of the mudmen in Papua New Guinea in spite of its connotation of primitiveness, although thus far we have no solid evidence to support this thesis.

30 Remember the case of O'Hanlon, discussed earlier, who received praise from Wahgi people for his book, which was thought to enforce their copyrights. It is not unthinkable that our article will play a role in local conflicts about cultural property rights. Of course we do not hope this will happen. We have tried to avoid including information that may be sensitive and have restricted ourselves to those data we consider to be general knowledge in the area.

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Abstract

The mudmen tradition of the Asaro people in the Eastern Highlands Province of Papua New Guinea has become an internationally recognized symbol of that country and also an evocative image of "primitive man" in general. This symbol has been appropriated in various international advertisements for products ranging from music to perfume. It is also used in campaigns to promote tourism in

Papua New Guinea and has entered almost every popular book and travel guide as an appealing symbol of the area.

As a local sign of identity the history of the mudmen is relatively short. Based on transformations of some older—and of course contested—traditions, the phenomenon of the mudmen began its existence during the first Goroka agricultural show in 1957. In this paper we trace the history of the mudmen to show how it developed in continuous interaction between local *and* foreign (tourist) needs and expectations. Appearing in diverse and only partly interacting discourses, the mudmen function as a local commodity-cum-marker-of-identity, as a symbol of Papua New Guinea national culture, and as a sign of primitiveness in western (commercial) discourses on self and other.

KEYWORDS: Asaro Mudmen, Papua New Guinea, masks, cultural copyright, invention of tradition, [ethno]-tourism, globalization