1. Introduction: New Lives for Old

> All through history men have greeted periods of change, the challenge coming from foreign ideas or other peoples, in many ways — by imitation, incorporation, rejection, transformation, trance, manifesto, retreat (Margaret Mead 1956: 16).

When a large gold mine was constructed on the main island of the Lihir group in 1995, Lihirians began to envision that the sort of life they had long dreamed of was closer to being in their grasp. For the past century, Lihirians have been beguiled by the sort of development that would genuinely enhance their lives. Unlike so many of their Melanesian compatriots, Lihirians were going to witness the realisation of past prophesies for material and social change that arose during previous social movements — albeit in decidedly unexpected ways. This large-scale resource development project has precipitated tremendous economic change and social upheaval: literally in a matter of years, Lihirians were propelled from a subsistence existence supported by sporadic copra sales into an industrialised economy. They shifted from moving on the periphery of the capitalist system to embracing one of its core activities. Given the changes that have occurred since construction of the mine, it is tempting to say that Lihirians have been completely bowled over by the juggernaut of modernity that has swept through their villages and men's houses. Yet for some time, Lihirians have been lining up ready to climb aboard and ride in the direction of the nearest trade store, car dealer, or market place. Lihirians have never eschewed the accoutrements of modernity, but have embraced different means for their acquisition to develop their lives and their culture on their own terms.

When I first began fieldwork in Kinami village on the main island of the Lihir group in mid-2003, I found myself quickly absorbed in the politics of development and cultural change. Men and women talked to me about what *was* occurring, which was frequently contrasted with what they thought *ought* to occur. People were deeply engaged in a conspicuous commentary on the state of change. After a year of sitting around smoky men's houses listening to, and engaging with, a discordance of ideas about the past, present and future, I approached the local community schools to ask the students for their impressions. I asked the students from Grades Four, Five and Six to either draw a portrait of themselves in the future, how they imagined they might look or what they might be doing, or to write a short story on what they thought the future of Lihir would be like. Three stories stood out:[1]

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1   I have not used pseudonyms in this book. I have presented these stories in their original English; some of the other stories were written in a mixture of Tok Pisin and English. No stories were written in Lihirian.

Story 1: This story I heard from some grand parents they said long ago in the past when missionaries first arrived here on the island, they form a little group that was called Nimamar. This group was interested in talking about Lihir Island.

They said that in the future Lihir Island is going to develop. And they said, this thing like cutting copra, cocoa and so on is going to stop. People of Lihir Island will not be sweating when searching for money. They will just sit and have free money coming in. They also said that Lihir Island is going to be like a city.

To conclude, now you can see that Lihir Island is changing and all things that they said is now coming true. So you can see that people of Lihir Island will be happy in their live time (Antonia Zanates, Grade Four, Kinami Community School, 2004).

Story 2: I think people in Lihir will not be able to do customs anymore, because now when people make custom they need one thing and that is money. In the future when mining ends, I think there will be no money or many kinds of good things. Where will the people in Lihir get their money from when they want to make custom? People will not be able to travel to other places to look for pigs to make custom. That is why I really think that custom will end too (Scholastica Lendai, Grade Six, Lakuplien Community School, 2004).

Story 3: I think in the future Lihir Island will not be the same as today. There is going to be changes on our Island. In the future Lihir is going to be an enormous city. Lihirians will be living in high quality permanent buildings with facilities like stoves, TV set, video and fridges. The whole island will be using electricity instead of firewood and lamps. Their ways of earning money will change from what is today. They will no longer use things like fire wood or traditional ways of cooking.

Ways of transporting goods and people from place to place will be much easier. Each family will have a car of its own. Lihir is going to be full of *raskols* [petty criminals]. I think in the future many young men and old men will leave their *hausboi* [men's house] and live only in their high quality permanent buildings. They will find life easier and forget their traditional ways of life. Ways of education will be much different from

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Although Papua New Guinean students are educated for the first three years in the vernacular, English is the official language used for the remainder of their education. In many cases, the national lingua franca Tok Pisin is more commonly used and more readily grasped. Tok Pisin and Lihirian terms are italicised and listed in separate glossaries.

now. Children will be learning and using computers and using modern technology. So Lihir will be different from what it is today (Francisca Bek, Grade Six, Kinami Community School, 2004).

These stories capture the central themes in this book, particularly Lihirian aspirations for development and the dependency of customary practices upon the capitalist economy. They remarkably delineate those aspects of Lihirian history, desire, and entanglement with global processes, which consume the thoughts, energies and concerns of so many Lihirians that I have come to know.

Plate 1-1: Lihirian children on the shores of change. Ladolam, looking north towards the Ailaya in Luise Harbour, circa 1983.

Photograph courtesy Rudolph Kiakpe.

Lihirian children have been exposed to the material world of modernity since their early years, and this has profoundly shaped their aspirations, dreams, fantasies, and sense of what is possible. Many of their stories and portraits depicted futures characterised by technological ease and the ability to consume and use mod-cons of the latest type, in a life typified by the trappings of modernity. They imagined themselves living in a world of choice, where the future held infinite possibilities. More importantly, they saw themselves as being different from their parents and ancestors. Some imagined themselves as rock stars, carpenters and accountants, or using computers, driving trucks in the mining pit, operating the massive shovel tractors, or owning modern homes. Girls drew themselves as air hostesses travelling regularly to Australia or as

Miss PNG in a beauty pageant, while boys pictured themselves in the army or as police officers chasing *ol raskol* through town. Like their older relatives, they imagined that the mine would provide the means for achieving an imagined future: it would be new lives for old.

However, their stories also reveal that the transformations taking place in Lihir are complex, and are not simply an exchange of the past for the future. In some cases, the future was less favourably described through tales of modern dystopia, with images of environmental change, social disintegration, abandoned traditions and familial breakdown. These symptoms of modern life also included famine, disease, chaos, moral bankruptcy, migration, sad memories of relocation, and the possibility that, when the mine closes, life might not actually be any better. Here the past was compared with the present, and was conspicuously apparent in an anticipated future characterised by a regression towards backwardness and traditional daily toil.[2] Their stories and portraits captured the diversity of Lihirian desires and perceptions of the past, present and future. Crucially, the differences between the stories and images from different schools expressed the ways in which the unequal distribution of wealth shapes different hopes, the intimate connection between their lives and the global economy, and their increasing dependency upon mining in order to remain active in the game of 'self-improvement'.

Talk about the future is not just a current phenomenon; Lihirians were discussing it well before mining began. Different social movements, such as the Nimamar Association described by Antonia Zanates, which had its roots in the colonial period, looked to a new utopian world order. Not everyone has been convinced that mining is the fulfilment of these prophesies, nor is there agreement about future prospects. The changes and inequalities experienced through mining have only strengthened local resolve to achieve these earlier dreams. However, Lihirians have been presented with different, complex and competing roads to their ideal land of modernisation. As these stories reveal, not only is there difference of opinion on how to reach this desired state, but there is a range of expectations (and fears) about what this new life will entail.

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2   Sigrid Awart, an Austrian ethno-psychologist who undertook field research in Lihir in 1990–91, made use of similar material, asking school children to write a short essay on the topic: 'What would I like to do after I finish Grade Six?'. Her Masters thesis was written in German (in 1993), and she has published one article in English (in 1996) where she makes reference to these stories. The occupational desires are generally similar to those listed in the stories I collected. However, as a result of contemporary influences, the students I spoke with listed a greater range of occupations. While she notes that boys were generally more interested than girls in obtaining technical occupations off the island, I found a more even spread between the sexes, with both girls and boys generally wanting to pursue a lifestyle outside of the village. However, the most noticeable shift was the number of students seeking a subsistence existence. Awart notes that out of 101 students, 22 per cent of the girls and 16 per cent of the boys wanted to become gardeners, whereas I found only three out of 120 students indicated any desire for this type of lifestyle. I found that the students were more concerned to escape this type of existence, or else they tended to think that mine closure would signal a return to subsistence living, which was not viewed positively.

With this in mind, I have cast my gaze on the ways that Lihirians have experienced modernity, both through colonialism and within the context of large-scale resource development, on the articulation of local social, economic and political change, and on their attempts to direct their lives towards different and new futures. This book seeks to understand what historically and culturally located Melanesians desire and seek. This is the story — indeed, the history — of what happens when the cargo actually arrives.

Understanding Local Responses to Global Processes

There is now enough evidence to see that different communities (or cultural groups) have responded to large-scale industrial development in rather different ways. This observation not only applies internationally, but particularly within Papua New Guinea (PNG). This is not to suggest that there are no similarities to be found. Broadly speaking, host communities tend to undergo dramatic social, economic, political and cultural change, which includes the transformation of the landscape, new ways of understanding land and resources, social stratification as a result of the unequal distribution of mine-derived wealth, new political hierarchies and struggles, the loss or transformation of local practices, knowledge and institutions, challenges to traditional social relations, gendered impacts and new forms of economic dependency.

When we drill down to the local level, we find that these processes unfold in entirely unique ways. Local contexts, cultural complexities and histories decisively shape the nature of mining operations and the ways in which communities respond to change, but these factors can also determine the types of impacts and changes that might be experienced. Nevertheless, it still appears that the ways in which Lihirians have responded to the social and economic changes and impacts brought by mining are quite unusual when compared to other mining communities throughout PNG. I propose that a more specific — or a more cultural — explanation of the ways that Lihirians have dealt with the corporate mining economy can be found in their peculiar history of social movements. These activities, which peaked with the Nimamar Association in the early 1980s, provide a key insight into the diverse and diffuse ways that Lihirians have responded to mining. At the heart of these movements is a concern with social unity, morality and the attainment of a prosperous future. While these aspirations have endured throughout the colonial period and the more recent mining era, Lihirians have not always agreed on how they will be achieved.

A large part of this book is dedicated to understanding these movements and their recent manifestations, which can be regarded as discrete paths to particular destinations. Lihirians commonly gloss these as *ol rot* (roads) — a Tok Pisin metaphorical concept which refers to something between a cult and an ideology (Filer 2006). These roads sometimes appear to be mutually exclusive, but sometimes as interdependent. My particular interest is how members of a local political elite developed the Lihir Destiny vision, which charts a very specific 'road' to an idealised Lihirian modernity. Throughout the period from 2000 to 2007, these leaders were responsible for renegotiating the benefits package for Lihirian landowners and the wider community that was to be delivered by the mining company. This process provided them with the opportunity to develop the vision which is laid out in the Lihir Sustainable Development Plan (LSDP) — the latest benefit-sharing agreement between the company and the Lihirian community. This agreement, which we can call the 'Destiny Plan', is primarily a road map for a new future devised by local leaders who believe that their mandate is the pursuit of a Lihirian cultural revolution that will be facilitated by mine-derived wealth. However, their plans embody an inherent contradiction between the values of competition and cooperation: they want to create a wealthy egalitarian Lihirian society, sustained by entrepreneurial activities, that is free from the adverse effects of economic competition and the more general social malaise created by the mine.

The Destiny Plan is largely structured around an ideology of smallholder economics, which Lihirians commonly gloss in Tok Pisin as *bisnis* (business), or what Marx once called the petty commodity mode of production, or what the World Bank calls small-scale enterprise. This ideology was inspired by the Personal Viability movement, which seeks to develop an 'entrepreneurial class' throughout Melanesia. The Destiny Plan therefore raises important questions about the meaning of 'development' in Melanesia, particularly as its highlights the enthusiasms, ambivalences and contradictions in the various ways that Lihirians approach social change and large-scale resource development.

The counterpart to this ideology is the reification of traditional custom — or *kastom* as it is glossed in Lihir — which is seen as a particular road for social unity, the distribution of wealth, male authority and Lihirian identity in much the same way that the Destiny Plan is an alternative road for development and a reformed society. When Lihirians talk about *kastom*, they are usually referring to the performance of mortuary rituals that involve large-scale ceremonial feasting and exchange. In recent years, Lihirian *kastom* has grown significantly, partly reflecting the capacity of the ceremonial economy to absorb new objects and forms of wealth, while resisting the absorption of values and practices associated with them in the global capitalist economy. But this efflorescence is also due to a mass appeal to *kastom* for social stability which, like the earlier

Nimamar movement, can be understood as a direct response to extreme change in a compressed historical period. This particular road lies somewhere between an ideology of *kastom* and a kind of 'custom cult' which is made explicit through the performance of mortuary rituals, emphasising the ceremonial aspects of the local gift economy.

This process also raises some important questions about the nature of economic and cultural continuity. Lihirian culture has been vitalised by rapid industrialisation in a context where it might ordinarily be expected that the global forces of capitalism will have their most destructive impact. This recalls the classic work by Richard Salisbury (1962), who documented the efflorescence of traditional ceremonial exchange systems in the central highlands of New Guinea following the introduction of the steel axe. At the same time, we find that the articulation between the capitalist economy and the ceremonial economy is partly dependent on the nature of the local pre-capitalist social system, which reflects the pioneering arguments by Scarlett Epstien (1968) in her analysis of 'primitive capitalism' amongst the Tolai people of New Britain. These twin processes and their associated transformations, which are highlighted through the performance of *kastom*, lead to a further question about how mortuary rituals retain their significance in such an altered context.

The background against which these processes are played out is the corporate mining economy, which in itself has given rise to a further ideological construct, which Colin Filer (1997a) called the 'ideology of landownership', which holds that the key to development is the compensation paid by developers to the customary owners of natural capital. It is this belief which lies at the heart of Lihirian expectations for development and their dependency upon the mining company to fulfil these desires. At one level, the Destiny Plan fundamentally seeks to deal with this relationship, but at the same time, we find that the creative ways in which Lihirians use mining benefits in the performance of *kastom* actually assists them to carry their culture forward in times of change. Yet these are not simple processes or strategies; they are often highly contested, and have produced entirely unanticipated results.

If these different roads sometimes appear to be leading to different places, it is also true that they sometimes converge and cross over one another. Consequently, Lihirians seem to move within a hybrid cultural and ideological space that reflects the articulation of a corporate mining economy, a neo-traditional ceremonial economy, and a household economy of the kind that Marshall Sahlins (1974) would call the 'domestic mode of production'. My purpose in this book is to explore the ways in which Lihirians negotiate their way along these roads, and to understand the intersections or the hybrid space or the creative synthesis that is formed in the process.

Local World Histories

The changes experienced over the past century have prompted a deep local concern with social morality. The more recent ideology of *kastom* is underpinned by such concerns, often expressed in phrases like *pasin bilong Lihir* (the ways of Lihir). Many Lihirians often argue that their culture — which revolves around matrilineal men's houses, mortuary feasts and ceremonial exchange as institutions of nurturance, generosity and social reproduction — is fundamentally geared towards the expression of social morality or virtuous sociality. But even if Lihirians once exemplified the original 'virtuous society', there is a sense in which they have only recently become interested in such ideals.

These concerns, which are made visible through local discourses on *kastom* and development, are arguably a particular manifestation of modernity. Following Trouillot (2002: 225), who draws upon Koselleck (1985), I take the sense of radical disjuncture between the past and the present, and the perception that a different (and uncertain) future is both attainable and indefinitely postponed, to be among the most crucial elements of the experience of modernity — essentially a regime of historicity. From this perspective, Lihirians have been decidedly modern for some time. The changes brought through early interaction with the colonial labour trade, mission endeavour, sporadic engagement with the cash economy, the gradual disenchantment of their world, and the increasing discontent that arose from realisation of their marginal position on a national and global scale, are emblematic of this modernity. Aspirations for unity and morality dramatically increased as Lihirians grappled with the changes brought through colonial rule, Independence and later through mining activities. Social transformations challenged received cultural values and institutions; the desire for a reformed society emerged as Lihirians imagined a break with the past and looked to a new future.

World systems theory has found new life in grander theories of globalisation which assert that the global envelops the local, creating similarity in the place of alterity. The significant issue in this book is the construction of particularity in the face of apparently homogenising and universalising forces. The discourse of globalisation is often uninformative because of an over-emphasis on global homogeneity. Too often it is assumed that the globalising capitalist economy obliterates local economies, only to remake them in its own reflection. However, as we can see from the students' stories, regardless of the ways in which the Western epoch unleashes capitalism, 'it is always as an intertwining with local markets, paths of circulation, modes of production, and conceptions of consumption' (LiPuma 2000: 12).

Globalisation is often used as a loose term to imply the processes whereby economic and political activities in marginal places are shaped or dominated by distant developed nations and their linked transnational corporations. Other understandings emphasise the articulation of new forms of social organisation in an increasingly borderless world where flows of capital and new technologies propel goods, information, people and ideologies around the globe at unimaginable speeds (Lockwood 2004: 1). Even though mining has provided infrastructure, technologies, goods and opportunities that have transformed Lihirian lives and created a sense of 'interconnectedness', most Lihirians still remain on the periphery of the global network. Quite simply, villagers do not have access to the same technology and forms of communication that are taken for granted in urban areas. Although more information is available through new media resources, many Lihirians still lack the educational and experiential background required to make sense of these novel influences. Furthermore, given that community negotiations with the mining company are often based on misunderstandings about the price of gold and the prevailing belief that the company has access to inexhaustible funds which it is deliberately withholding from Lihirians, it is difficult to consider Lihirians as equally informed participants in any aspect of a global economic system (Macintyre and Foale 2004: 154).

Neo-Marxist interpretations of cultural change generally presuppose a depressingly inevitable conclusion whereby the 'civilizing' minority creates a world in its own image. World systems analysis and Marxist theory might appear anachronistic, but many people still think that, as the West materially and intellectually invades the rest of the world, peripheral peoples are merely the 'victims and silent witnesses' of their own cultural subjugation (Wolf 1982: x). Too often, analysis is directed at the ways in which people are encapsulated by the world system so as to 'suffer its impacts and become its agents' (ibid.: 23), rather than the ways in which they appropriate elements of this system for their own purposes.

To avoid what Errington and Gewertz (2004: 10) describe as the delineation of an inexorable and inevitable history, and to genuinely understand the process of cultural change, we need an anthropology that locates people within their own history, and that recognises the multifarious ways in which all people are agents of this history. This is an approach that emphasises the local articulations of global modernity, and that moves beyond simple binary oppositions between the West and the Rest, illuminating what Knauft (2002: 25) calls 'the social and discursive space in which the relationship between modernity and tradition is configured'.

In a place like Lihir, where Western capitalism apparently stands in opposition to traditional culture, it would be easy to revert to a dualistic approach. Many Lihirians do so themselves. Like a monument to the immorality and exploitation

of capitalism, the mine processing plant towers over local men's houses and the 'moral exchange economies' that sustain social reproduction (Bloch and Parry 1989). In a Manichean showdown between the local and the global, it is only a matter of time before mining delivers the fatal blow that ensures Lihirians can do nothing more than recreate themselves according to an imposed image of civilisation. However, although the mining project epitomises modern technology, is the distilled essence of capitalism, and brings the differences between the local and the global into stark relief, we cannot simply equate this moment of neo-colonial capitalist expansion with Lihirian history as a whole. As Sahlins argues, 'it remains to be known how the disciplines of the colonial state are culturally sabotaged' (2005c: 486).

The Inevitability of Continuity and Particularity?

An adequate account of Lihirian lives within the context of mining must be approached from a temporal perspective that concentrates less on enduring structural relations and more on the relations between structure and time (Schieffelin and Gewertz 1985: 2). Marshall Sahlins takes an approach to history and anthropology which is guided by the premise that 'in all change there is continuity' (Sahlins 2005a: 9), and allows for a nuanced understanding of the relationship between continuity and change that shows how 'the transformation of a culture is a mode of its reproduction' (Sahlins 1985: 138). More importantly, his work reveals how continuity is itself an historical product, not the indication of a lack of history, for it is the result of 'happenings', not stasis. This viewpoint allows us to recognise the ways in which Lihirians have maintained their cultural integrity throughout a tumultuous period of change. Cultural categories shape moments in history and often endure in spite of change, even in those cases where the other player represents the dominant forces of the global capitalist system — whether it be the colonial administration or a multinational mining company. What emerges is an image of particularity that results from the interaction of internal social and cultural structures with the external influences that effect change. That is how we begin to understand Lihirian syncretism, for the use of introduced wealth and institutions has long been the systematic condition of their own culturalism — their authenticity and autonomy.

These processes are perhaps most economically captured in the concept of 'develop*man*' (Sahlins 1992), by which Sahlins integrates his opposition to the determinate hegemony of world systems theory with his ideas about indigenous agency and cultural integrity. The term was coined out of his mishearing of a Papua New Guinean Tok Pisin speaker's pronunciation of the word 'development'. Develop*man* is intended to capture that particular moment when indigenous peoples use Western goods (and institutions like those of

capitalism and Christianity) to enhance their own ideas about life. Accordingly, his neologism is meant to reflect the 'indigenous way of coping with capitalism, a passing moment that in some places has already lasted more than one hundred years' (ibid.: 13). He argues that the first commercial impulse of indigenous people is not to become just like Westerners, but more like themselves: to build their own culture on a bigger and better scale than ever before (ibid.). It is precisely development from the perspective of the people concerned.

Develop*man* is easily recognised in many Melanesian societies: with the introduction of capitalism, there have been more pigs and shells exchanged than ever before, while new goods have made their way into the sphere of ceremonial exchange. Lihirian mortuary rituals are not insulated from the cash economy; instead, these practices are invigorated by access to new goods and forms of wealth. The so-called 'spectre of inauthenticity' (Jolly 1992) reflects Lihirian desires for modern lifestyles and the unanticipated paradox of our time: that globalisation develops apace with localisation (Sahlins 1999: 410).

As a follow-up to the bulk of his work on cultural continuity-in-change, Sahlins asks how this process might be ruptured. What is required to break this cycle, so that people will embrace Western values, make the achievement of develop*ment* the definitive goal, and thus become truly modern subjects? He suggests that the answer lies in cultural humiliation: people will not stop interpreting the world through their received cultural categories, and bending things to fit their values and categories, until they come to see their culture as something worthless. But before people abandon their culture, they must 'first learn to hate what they already have, what they have always considered their well-being', and to 'despise what they are, to hold their own existence in contempt — and want then, to be someone else' (Sahlins 1992: 23–4).

This is a critical observation. Lihirians have never (or not yet) passed through a phase of genuine cultural iconoclasm. Lihirians have long imagined a new future, the Destiny Plan is the latest attempt to realise this dream, and in some ways it does seek to hasten the transition from develop*man* to development. However, in each instance, different leaders have still imagined a grand, modern, or reformed *Lihirian* society. As we shall see throughout the following chapters, Lihirians have not suffered from any sort of 'global inferiority complex'. At times, they have felt frustrated, denigrated and marginalised, but their desires and strategies to achieve new lives for old have never hinged upon a kind of Faustian all-or-nothing bargain. Their search for development is not imagined as an absolute transformation, but rather as a total realisation. If people must first make a break with the past in order to imagine a new future — a conceptual objectification — this does not necessarily imply that they will then abandon everything from their past. Even though the concepts of develop*man* and development are probably better understood as ideal types (in the Weberian

sense), they still provide a useful way to think through Lihirian experiences of modernity. As we look at the ways in which Lihirians simultaneously — or sometimes by turns — pursue develop*man* and development along the various roads on offer, then we begin to understand that cultural change takes place in the hybrid (and sometimes very uneasy) space that is created as people forge a new existence for themselves.

The Chapters

The chapters in the book are organised in such a way as to provide the reader with a background to the mining project, and then to trace the transformations that occurred from the colonial period through to the mining era. In the next chapter, I describe the history of the mine's development since exploration began in 1982, and the way in which the mine has come to dominate the local landscape and economy. In Chapter 3, I consider the history of Lihirian engagement with the outside world, outlining social and political developments that provided the genesis of social movements which prophesised an inverted world order. In Chapter 4, I provide a representation of Lihirian *kastom* as it was before the start of mining exploration, situating Lihir within a wider New Ireland 'areal culture'. Chapter 5 is built around the specific forms of social stratification that have arisen since the start of the mine construction as a result of the unequal distribution of mining benefits. Chapter 6 shifts the focus to the emergence of a local political elite and the Lihir Destiny Plan — especially the ways in which members of the elite have reinvented historical ideals in order to deal with the actual and prospective impacts documented in the previous chapter, including strategies for curbing supposedly 'wasteful' develop*man* ways. In Chapter 7, I return to the question of how mortuary feasts retain their status as the embodiments of tradition and *kastom*, and the contradictions between ideology and practice which reveal a deep-seated moral ambivalence about reciprocity, equality and exchange that threaten collective stability and expose the fantasy of virtuous sociality. In the concluding chapter, I summarise the argument that Lihirian cultural continuity and change is best understood through an examination of the complex intercultural zone which is created through the interplay of the local and the global.