

DARK TREMBLING: ETHNOGRAPHIC NOTES ON SECRECY AND CONCEALMENT IN HIGHLAND SULAWESI

KENNETH M. GEORGE
Harvard University

This ethnographic commentary explores the role of secrecy and concealment in a minority religious community in highland Sulawesi (Indonesia), and their place in the construction of ethnographic discourse. Discussion shows how a "culture of concealment" has emerged as a practical and realistic response to encroaching ideologies and social formations since the pre-colonial era. At the same time, the political use of secrecy takes its idioms from ritual practice, a site in which concealment may have "ontological" significance. These dimensions of secrecy shaped the ethnographic dialogue between researcher and hosts, and highlight the need for a critical and reflexive anthropology to ground itself in the sociohistorical concerns of those whom ethnographers study. [secrecy, ritual, cultural politics, Sulawesi, reflexive ethnography]

Introductory Remarks

... amidst the vastness of all that we are conscious of not knowing, or of trying to ascertain, we experience as secret the spaces from which we feel shut out.

—Sissela Bok, *Secrets*

The secret society is so much considered an enemy of the central power that, even conversely, every group that is politically rejected is called a secret society.

—Georg Simmel, "The Secret Society"

Ethnographic dialogue does not happen innocently. Taking place between positioned interests and understandings, ensnared in the social and political asymmetries that bind ethnographer and other, ethnographic dialogue is deeply motivated. Cultural anthropology has long known the skewed conditions that mark out the grounds for ethnographic judgment, conscience, and understanding. Yet the discipline has been slow to acknowledge in print the relationships of power that color cultural inquiry and representation. As a result the post-Sixties literature on the politics and poetics of ethnographic representation has taken the field on a dramatic turn toward reflexivity and dialogism.¹ Forgiving the arguments of polemicists who see the disciplinary critique as a menace to anthropology, and those of idolaters who see it as saving grace, the emerging debates on the politics of representation should help refine, perhaps reform, ethnographic work and relax anxieties about maintaining or divulging trade secrets.

Much of the critical literature has to do with the making of ethnographies and ethnographic au-

thority amid the shifting movements of power and difference in colonial and post-colonial contexts. The critique of ethnographic practice, as such, tends to dwell on representations that distort, silence, or do violence to other cultures. Following a Foucauldian (1972, 1979) path of analysis, many writers compellingly show how ethnographic representations can fit all too well with a panoptic discourse that promotes control and power through knowledge, a discourse wholly consonant with colonial and imperial projects. Yet the reflexivist critique succeeds less often and well, it seems to me, in showing how our ethnographic practices relate to the immediate social realities and problems experienced by other persons in other societies.² That is to say, the focus on ethnographic discourse (and on a self-centered reflexivity) runs the danger of neglecting the socially grounded concerns of those people whom ethnographers study.³

Asked to contribute to this set of articles, I began to think once again about the social and cultural contexts that shaped my field dialogues with members of a minority religious community in the highlands of Sulawesi (Indonesia). A very pressing concern throughout my time in the field (1982-85) was secrecy. On one hand, secrecy was of enormous relevance to the community as such, for with it the community was able to control social relations with outsiders and to resist encroaching ideologies—a theme common to several articles in this collection. On the other hand, the terms of local secrecy not only dictated the ethical course of my fieldwork but also provided a key problem for interpretation and social analysis. In this article, then, I will discuss

the place of secrecy in this community, its history, and how it came to structure my fieldwork. Drawing from work by Simmel (1950) and Herdt (1990), I also will explore how local ritual practices provided the idioms of secrecy that would come to govern the community's relations with the outside world. I should make clear from the outset that the problem (including its ethical dimensions) is not simply one of whether an ethnographer finds out about, intrudes upon, or is let in on things secret or hidden.⁴ Rather, the real problem, the real secret, begins with knowing what kinds of knowledge and what kinds of relationships are culturally (and historically) constructed, recognized, and read as "secret." Secrecy, of course, is a way to shape meaning and understanding as well as a way to create misunderstanding and misrecognition. Yet it would be naïve to think that it is only epistemological differences that are at stake. Because it is both a mode and an embedded artifact of social and political relations, secrecy plays a powerful part in the making of social and ideological difference. A very basic ethnographic move, then, is to acknowledge the cultural and sociohistorical conditions under which both secrets and the concept of secrecy are formulated. The ensuing move is to judge how such secrets enter into the making of ethnographic representations.

Seen at a Remove

My work in the Sulawesi highlands centered on *ada' mappurondo*, the ancestral religion of villagers living in the headwater regions of the Salu Mambi and Salu Hau. Followers of *ada' mappurondo* number roughly 3500—less than ten percent of the region's population—and make their living by tending rice terraces, swiddens, and coffee groves. Kinship is bilateral and marriage patterns reflect a preference for uxorilocal residence and village endogamy. In the course of the last 200 years, upland society has fractured along religious lines, such that today it is impossible to find a village oriented wholly to *ada' mappurondo*. In fact, most highlanders in the area have converted to Islam or Christianity, and look condescendingly upon their *mappurondo* neighbors and kin. Worse, their censorious attitudes have gained ideological and institutional support from the Indonesian government whose state policies champion monotheistic religion as the keystone of solid progress-oriented citizenship. It should be emphasized, then, that followers

of *ada' mappurondo* make up a politically marginalized minority community with a distinct ideological focus and identity. They differ from their Muslim and Christian kin by virtue of their commitment to the ancestral ritual order.

Under such circumstances it would not be surprising if *mappurondo* villagers refused to talk with most outsiders about their ritual practices. Time and again we see secrecy and secretiveness used to resist the intrusive presence of ethnographers, missionaries, and civil officers. For example, the Yekuana of Venezuela have shown a rigid unwillingness to discuss their mythic order with ethnographers for the better part of a century (Guss 1986). Elsewhere, the Pueblo communities long ago took their sacred practices underground and set out to punish anyone who would divulge religious secrets to outsiders (Nabokov 1982; Scheper-Hughes 1987). Further, it is not just "tribal" communities that resort to secrecy as a form of resistance, but "ethnic" and "sectarian" groups as well. To mention but two European examples, both the peasant Irish (Scheper-Hughes 1987) and the Waldenses (Simmel 1950) have cultivated secretiveness in the face of external threats. As for the *mappurondo* settlements, I did happen to visit one village in which several families harbored deep suspicions toward me. Other households having invited me to take part in a ritual, there was little the aggrieved could do except give me stoney looks and grumble that my camera and tape recorder were useless anyway. Here the power of "secrecy" was so strong that it would thwart or survive my documentary efforts. *Your things won't be able to catch it. The photos and cassettes will be blank.* *Mappurondo* practices were to remain hidden, declared invisible and inaudible.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. It was largely the shroud of secrecy enveloping *mappurondo* practices that lured me to live and work along the Salu Mambi. To begin, I originally had planned to study the ritual oral literature of the Sa'dan Toraja. Fast put off by the impact of tourism on Sa'dan ritual life,⁵ I turned west toward the settlements of the Mamasa Toraja, a society far less prominent than the Sa'dan in the ethnographic literature on Sulawesi. Here, however, church and mission had been able to convert 95 percent of the Mamasa, leaving the indigenous ritual order more of a memory than a set of ongoing authoritative practices. Disappointed once more, I decided to pass through the Salu Mambi region lying a bit

further to the west. There I learned from Christians and Muslims that a significant number of villagers had resisted *agama* (Indonesian: "religion") in favor of ancestral ritual tradition, termed *adat* (Ind. "custom") by the converted (cf. Atkinson 1983). That this local tradition had shown resilience in the face of intrusive ideologies and institutions was puzzling and appealing given my experience with the Sa'dan and Mamasa. Tourism was virtually absent, and the region was clearly an administrative and economic backwater. The place looked promising as far as the kind of work I wanted to do. Then, too, the Salu Mambi region for all intent and purposes had gone unreported in the ethnographic literature. A handful of mission reports from the thirties, brief mention in civil and military notes written prior to 1925, and a reference in Sa'dan political genealogies were all I could recall on the area, and none of it treated local religion.⁶ That next to nothing was known about traditional ritual life along the Salu Mambi convinced me to stay. The secret, the mysterious, the unknown indeed fascinate (cf. Simmel 1950: 337).

It should be clear that I began fieldwork with romantic notions of authenticity, cultural difference, and "doing anthropology." At the outset, too, a faith in the innocence of fieldwork allowed me to misjudge my role in the social and political relations of ethnographic representation. Yet in spite of my social and political status, I would not come to control ethnographic dialogue with followers of *ada' mappurondo*. To the contrary, it was the *mappurondo* community, with its concern for secrecy and tabus, that would usually call the tune. In fact, it was the community's past and present ability to cloak its ritual practices that allowed it to cope with the concrete social and political conditions that have shaped life in highland Sulawesi. Had there not been a history of concealment in this community, *ada' mappurondo* would have been a thing of the past. In short, it was this "culture of concealment" that set the social, ethical, and epistemological tenor of my field research.⁷

Some months later I returned to the region and took residence in Mambi, the village that traditionally hosted emissaries from districts elsewhere in the mountains and on the coast. I had missed *mappurondo* "ritual season" by a few weeks; save for funerals, there would be no rituals until the end of the next harvest year. Two months passed before I was even to meet someone from the *mappurondo* community. During that time, I

talked at length with Muslims, Christians, and members of the civil service about ancestral ritual. The last usually talked about the dangers of *animisme* (Ind. "animism"), of "praying to rocks and trees," giving proof once more that anthropological discourse can race ahead of ethnographers and greet them in the field. For these civil servants, the *mappurondo* community was *terasing* (Ind.), "estranged," a group in exile that had yet to embrace religion (Ind. *belum beragama*). Christians had another way of naming those who followed such ritual practices: *tomalillin*, or "people of the dark." I first took this term as a kind of slur on pagan belief, and reckoned that it had roots in scripture or the remarks of preachers and missionaries. Muslims, meanwhile, spoke of these persons as *orang kafir* (Ind.), unbelievers, and called the pagan ritual order *ada' mappurondo*, "*mappurondo* adat [Ind./Arabic 'custom']."

The word *mappurondo* troubled me in my first months in Mambi. When I asked for glosses of the word in Indonesian, people usually responded with *sudah dipesankan*, roughly "already given [or passed on] as a message." But my early work with word roots in the Salu Mambi area suggested that this gloss was missing something. I tried a Torajan-Indonesian dictionary for clues. *Ma'parondo*, for the Sa'dan, means to shake with malarial chill or to tremble in fright ("like when you see a mad dog," someone was later to write me, quoting a Torajan acquaintance). Another misreading, I thought, although images of darkness and trembling played in my mind until they fused into a metaphor for my misunderstanding and outsider-ship, for my being in the dark. After working later that year with lontara' manuscripts from the Muslim lowland communities of the Bugis and Mandar, I realized that *mappurondo* derived from the Bugis *ma-pura-onro*, meaning "already in place." Thus, the term *ada' mappurondo* implied a response to, and a reformulation by, the lowland cultures that exerted hegemony over the island prior to the era of direct Dutch control. Incorporating a Muslim perspective, the term reflected the effort of highlanders to translate their ancestral practices into the interpretive and discursive framework of an intruding culture.

The death of Pua' Malangka, an aged man who held the title of Indona Bambang ("The Mother of Bambang," an adat territory upriver from Mambi), brought me face to face with members of the *mappurondo* community for the first

time. Friends in Mambi urged me to make the hour's walk upstream to Rantepalado, the village where the mourning and burial were to take place. Escorted by the Christian village administrator, I arrived at Pua' Malangka's home and climbed up the entry ladder, worried about my intruding upon persons consumed with grief over the man who "slept" beside the centerpost of the house. Ambe Ukusam, eldest son of the deceased, offered coffee and tobacco and talked with me about his father, the mournful seven-stroke rhythm of the hanging drums and the keening of the *sulim barata* ("flutes of the dead") making lapses in the conversation less difficult. As the sun reached mid-sky, Ambe Ukusam left me in the company of a few guests and went off to make sure everything was set for the rites that were to take place in the course of the next three days.

Funerals are one of the few occasions when tabus against storytelling are relaxed, for stories can distract anguished hearts. My being there was a story in itself: Who was I? Where did I come from? What brought me to the Salu Mambi? One of the men nicknamed me Turundilangi', literally "descends from the sky," but which might be better glossed as "out of the blue." I spent the day filling in my story around their questions, telling them about the research I'd like to do. But it was nightfall before they would tell their version of my story. It fell to Ambe Gani to tell me of their surprise. The evening preceding his death, Pua' Malangka woke from sleep and told his family of a dream. *They say he said, "A stranger is coming to see me, but I will be gone." He would be dead. They say he said, "Take in the stranger as kindred." Two mornings, you came here.*

This was getting interesting. On whose narrative ground did I walk? One of Ambe Gani's companions retold my origins: *They say long ago one of our elders left to cross the sea. They don't know where he went—maybe to the land of the Dutch. This could mean the lands of any white persons. Whether he took a wife, whether he had children and grandchildren, no one truly knows. You may be his descendant returning to us.*

Two different stories, two different interpretations—mine, theirs—coping with my outsidership and changing it through a grasping for sense and coherence. Theirs, domesticating me with dreams and tales of ancestral history. Mine, constructed through anthropological discourse, presuming their otherness, their outsidership. Without question, our

narratives played into the complexly and asymmetrically structured relations that positioned our meeting. Yet as Hans Medick (1987) reminds us, the narrative reach for meaning and coherence may also be the generative site for social relationships. The struggle for meaning, he writes,

is formed in the context of the social relations of individuals, groups, classes, and cultures, which are at the same time constituted by the struggle. Reciprocity, dependency, and resistance—and their mingling—are therefore not "structurally given"; in reality they come into being only in the struggle for meaning (1987: 98).

The clash and mix of our narratives marked an episode in the clash of different cultural orders, orders vested with different modes of understanding, different degrees of social and political power, and different ways of being. Having found myself in these kinds of episodes throughout my fieldwork, I find I cannot agree with Berger's critique and caricature of ethnographic practice (this issue). Ethnography is a plural and revisionary task, something to be kept loose, not in the pursuit of unassailable truths, but rather, with the purpose of acknowledging worlds that resist or lie beyond our certitude and schemes of knowing. It is a way to discover what is at stake for those who mark our historicity and finitude.⁸

What is at stake for these villagers is *being mappurondo*. What troubles them deeply is being misunderstood. As I was about to leave Rantepalado, Ambe Ukusam would ask me why *ada' mappurondo* could not be taught in local schools, why the civil servants called his beliefs and practices animistic. *Animism? What is it? I don't know this animism. I only know that I am afraid. Afraid of the debata [spirits] and afraid of the government.* A longstanding tradition of concealment had guarded the mappurondo community, its ritual order, and its sense of being. Ironically, their secretiveness was now being misread—thus socially and politically transformed—as a sign of subversiveness, backwardness, and wrong-thinking.

Under the Dark Shroud

Not long after Pua' Malangka's funeral I joined Christian acquaintances in wedding festivities upriver in Salutabang, a village with a significant number of mappurondo households. One of the mappurondo elders there, Ambe Uheku, confronted the host of the wedding. Mappurondo terraces had

already been "wounded" by the till, putting into effect a village-wide tabu on noise, laughter, music, weddings, and other "life-sphere" rituals. His anger went even deeper upon learning that my Christian friends had put on a surprise "culture-show" (Ind. *pameran budaya*) for me as light entertainment and education, including some old headhunting songs (George 1990, n.d.), a chant invoking the debata of household rites, and stage versions of women's trance dance. Ambe Uheku saw it not only as poking fun at ada' mappurondo, but as sacred things out of place. Bitter about what had happened, he would later scold the newlywed husband:

I have coffee beans. I will give them to you and you can roast them up and make coffee. I have sheaves of rice. Go ahead and take them, and cook up some rice. But this is my religion. I will give you my religion. But don't, don't turn my religion into culture.

For me, the words stung. This was a version of "the raw and the cooked" quite unlike the one I had digested in pre-field readings.⁹ Ambe Uheku's impassioned reprimand bore protest against the arrogation of local tradition by the discursive tactics of intruding ideologies and social formations. Powerful institutions were competing with the mappurondo community for ideological control and social production of words and meanings (cf. Volosinov 1973). Against a dominant discourse that denied him a religion (*agama*) and treated his sacred tradition as "culture" and "art" (two of several meanings and connotations for the Indonesian term *budaya*), or as "custom" (*adat*), Ambe Uheku was pointing at an abusive misunderstanding that concealed the real nature of mappurondo practices.

Though they were aimed at his nephew, I took Ambe Uheku's words as an admonishment for me as well. After all, I was part of a "culture industry," albeit of a different sort. While I had no intention of turning traditional sacred practices into ethnic song and dance (Ambe Uheku's most immediate fear), I did feel troubled that my ethnographic interest in ada' mappurondo might involve misrecognition, misrepresentation, and a dangerous disclosure of secrets.¹⁰ Knowing and writing about ada' mappurondo had to involve my coming to terms with its shroud of secrecy and tabus. It meant knowing how and why secrecy was constructed as it was, as well as honoring both the tabus on ritual practice and those limits placed

upon what I should know.

An important opening for me was a glance back into history provided by one of the memorized recitations of male elders. The scene takes place in the late eighteenth century when Islam is being imported for the first time into the mountain region. The adjacent adat territories of Mambi and Bambang are members of Pitu Ulunna Salu, "The Seven Headwaters"—a league of allied mountain communities. The Muslim coastal principality of Balanipa has sent a gift to Mambi—a copy of the Koran—igniting a quarrel between the mountain neighbors.

Says Indona Bambang to Indona Mambi:

*Do not eat away at the house
by bringing a newcomer to the adat of Pitu Ulunna Salu.*

Says Mambi:

*Don't come to complain, Indona Bambang,
about the gift in my sarong from my lords at Balanipa.*

Says Bambang:

*Don't complain, then, about the smoke at the door of
Salukona*

who burns incense

and sacrifices a chicken at the border of the land.

*I will mark the borders of the land at Bambang with
thread so that the newcomer does not eat away at the
house.*

The story, so far, tells of the heated words of political and ideological conflict over ritual practices. In mountain political tradition, neither territory may intrude into the affairs of the other, although Bambang, in its role as "watchpost of adat" (*su'bu'an ada*), is obliged to sound alarm when it senses threat to the integrity of adat. So as to contain the dangerous intrusion of Islam, here embodied in the Koran, Bambang secures its borders with thread, that is, it simply declares itself sealed to Islamic discourse and its consequences.

Soon after, the debata took offense at the alien text and abandoned the rice fields at Mambi, the ritual hub of upland agriculture. As a result, the harvest failed and famine set in. The recitation continues with the Indona Mambi pleading to the Indona Bambang for help:

Indona Mambi calls out, calls to Indona Bambang

Says Indona Mambi:

Come here Indona Bambang.

*Pick up the fallen land and the fallen people
these your lands and your people.*

Indona Bambang goes downriver saying:

*Mambi, move it downriver to Panompa that Koran of
yours.*

Indona Mambi moves the Koran downriver to Panompa.

Once the offending Koran had been moved to a village downstream, the debata resumed their guardianship of the rice crop and prosperity returned to Mambi.

Although the source of misfortune had been carried off to a remote village where it would do no harm, Mambi held to its new faith. A dilemma remained: How could the moral and ritual tradition be kept safe from the advance of Islam? The leaders of the mountain league held council near Mambi to discuss the problem. So as to prevent Islam from encroaching further on upland ritual tradition, the league declared Bambang as a retreat for mappurondo tradition:

*The newcomer eats away at the house.
The watchpost of adat
is a room covered by a dark shroud
not to be seen
not to be heard*

With these words the highlanders concealed local ritual tradition from the gaze of Islam, and placed it out of earshot. At the same time, these words transformed ada' mappurondo into the religion of a social enclave.

When Dutch patrols and civil officers arrived in the highlands in 1906, this social and ideological enclave at Bambang was still intact. The upstream district was a hearth of mappurondo activity, while Mambi was fully Muslim. It was no accident, then, that the Dutch missions (the Indische Kerk through 1927, thereafter, the Christliche Gereformeerde Kerk) ignored Mambi and devoted their efforts to converting the "people of the dark" in Bambang, a project continued today by the Gereja Toraja Mamasa (the Mamasa Toraja Church) and some evangelical groups. In contrast to the social and historical forces that brought Islam to the mountains, Christianity arrived in the person of colonial and mission figures who were interested in direct administrative rule. There was little the mappurondo community could do to keep Christianity out of Bambang. A story is told about the Indona Bambang in the first years of Dutch rule. *They say he said, "If the adat of the Tosarani [Christians] is good, Bambang will prosper. If it brings ruin, it will be gored on the horns of this water buffalo."*¹¹ Before a year had passed, the Indona Bambang was dead, gored by the very water buffalo to which he had pointed when making his declaration about Christianity. The message was not lost on the mappurondo community. Still, con-

versions to Christianity were infrequent for nearly fifty years. It was not until the early 1970s that large numbers of mappurondo villagers entered the church, a time when persons supposedly lacking religion became suspect in the eyes of an Indonesian bureaucracy prone to associating lack of faith in God with subversive, pro-communist leanings.

As I have suggested already, the enclavement of ada' mappurondo was also the "hidden" yet determining factor in my choice of field site and field project. Viewed cynically, my work, this text, are but a part of a cultural mop-up operation. More charitably, I can offer practical and realistic witness to an ongoing history of confrontation between the mappurondo community and more dominant orders. In particular, I can explore how concealment and secrecy have been put to use in an effort to keep a degree of control over the social reproduction of the community and its ideological order (cf. Scott 1990).

Taking cue from Simmel's classic essays on secrecy and the secret society (1950), I would argue that the historical concealment of ada' mappurondo should be seen as a defensive strategy of exclusion against neighbors and kin who have embraced the hostile ideologies of powerful exogenous forces. Bounded metaphorically, socially, and spatially, the mappurondo community can enjoy a cohesiveness, a sense of possession, and an awareness of itself as a group. Further, the exclusionary practices that cloak and constitute the manufacture and safeguarding of ideological difference have the potential to promote within the mappurondo community a sense of superiority toward the outer world (George 1991). This sense of superiority, of course, does little to diminish political realities; outside institutions remain dominant and censorious toward the mappurondo community in both attitude and policy. At the same time, mappurondo villagers see their commitment to ancestral tradition as altruistic. Their historic task has been, and continues to be, to provide sanctuary for ritual practices that protect the welfare of the entire headwater region. As the surviving "watchpost of adat," the mappurondo settlements in Bambang guard local tradition for the benefit of even those who have turned to the Bible or the Koran. Interestingly, there have been times when Muslim or Christian villagers appear to have acknowledged this guardianship of local tradition, as in cases where the mountain region as a whole was threatened. For example, Muslim households in Mambi moved their ancestral heir-

looms upriver to mappurondo territory in 1958 when their own settlement was occupied by the separatist rebel forces of Kahar Muzakhar. Still, the predominant sentiment of outsiders is that the mappurondo community has no special claim to ancestral tradition or the ancestral past.

Simmel also has written that the secret, as a "sociological form, stands in neutrality above the value functions of its contents" (1950: 331; cf. Bok 1983: 7-9). His point is that secrecy may cloak the exalted and the virtuous as easily as it does the evil, the corrupting, and the base. Secrecy thus may fuel opposing discourses. In the case in question, outsiders looking in—and here I include anthropology—suspect the mappurondo community of hiding something subversive or concealing a troubling otherness. Insiders looking out perceive threats to their sense of being and their control of meaning. But unlike many secret societies and ritual cults, the mappurondo community shows deeper anxieties about letting exogenous ideologies creep in than letting secret knowledge pass to the outside.

The thrust of Simmel's work brings us to see that secrecy is already a concession to an outsider's power and presence. Insofar as that is true, Simmel chooses to foreground the way in which the secret society is dependent upon an encompassing social order. Yet I think it helpful to go a step further and view the line of secrecy as mutually constructed, at least in the case with which I am dealing. That is to say, it probably served the interests of the Muslim mountain communities to have ada' mappurondo withdrawn upstream, to have what was "already in place" obscured by a declared invisibility and inaudibility. More generally, the "dark shroud" endured as metaphor for the social production of ideological difference, for social realms that had to be kept separate.

"Not to be seen. Not to be heard."

So far, I have tried to chart some of social and historical relations that led to the enclavement of ada' mappurondo, and have tried to suggest some of the motives and consequences such enclavement implies for insiders and outsiders, including myself. But what of the "culture of concealment?" What was it about, and why should it draw from images of a shroud and from notions of invisibility and inaudibility?

As I got to know Ambe Ukusam, Ambe

Uheku, and others in the mappurondo community I learned that ritual practices, per se, are not all that secret. Villagers run ceremonies in an open manner, and most of those who wish to hold one make the effort to go to Mambi to arrange the police permits required for "events" (Ind. *acara*) in which ten or more persons will gather. Funerary rites (*patomatean*, "the time of those who are dead") and weddings (*pa'bannetauan*, "the time of human seed"), in particular, are free of secrecy.

Secretiveness and constraint do enter the picture, however, by way of the tabus (*pemali*) that shape the rituals of *pa'bisuan*, "the time of quickening spirits." First, tabus rigidly constrain the time and place where *pa'bisuan* ceremonies may be mentioned, discussed, or performed. For example, the annual post-harvest headhunting rite known as *pangngae*, which is today run in "symbolic" fashion only (that is, no real heads are taken), may not be discussed openly until it "happens" (George 1990, 1991, n.d.). As soon as *pangngae* is over, mention of it is again forbidden. Second, ideas about gender and gender difference come to the fore in *pa'bisuan* (George 1993). Although men, women, and children take part in all *pa'bisuan* ceremonies, there are key times when men or women go "off-stage"—out of sight, out of hearing—to do the things imagined to be peculiar or necessary to their kind. To take the case of *pangngae* once more, the cohort of headhunters—all of whom are male—makes its journey out of the village in secret. No woman may look upon them at this time; to do so would make her fatally ill. Similarly, when women gather in secret to prepare for household rites, men must avoid looking at or listening to the women. Should they do so, the men would bloat up and die.

By concealing their practices in the way that they do, mappurondo men and women essentially hide themselves, and *something* of themselves, from one another. In a sense, their masculinity and femininity depend on differences made and kept in secret, as much as upon differences made visible and audible in ritual performance or everyday life. Here, Gilbert Herát's (1990) "ontological theory" of secrecy may illuminate the case. Pointing out that Simmel's "miserly" theory of secrecy demands that it always refer to something other than itself, namely, society, Herdt writes:

The semiotics of secrecy suggest that in the communication process, the sender knows (or feels) that the receiver has a different ontology. . . . [T]hose with secrets have

something profound to hide and protect, and they know it: their worldly and metaphysical existence. Their secrets actually signify the reality they refuse to share or surrender to outsiders (1990: 365-366).

In light of this approach, mappurondo men and women may *know about* each other's secret practices, but do not, and under local tabus cannot, know one another's "secret being and reality" on an experiential basis.

The idioms of invisibility and inaudibility that shield the mappurondo community from the outside world, I would argue, derive from the gendered sphere of ritual itself.¹² Further, the image of the "dark shroud" said to cloak the mappurondo enclave at Bambang, may have its source in the rare and extremely elaborate ceremony of *ma'bua' tumba'*, a household prosperity rite run under the authority of women. Having taken part in *ma'bua' tumba'*, I can provide a bit of firsthand information. For this rite, men and women put together a tent-like shroud on the "downriver" portion of the floor, between the house centerpost and the hearth. Draped with sarongs and imported cloth, the tent extends up to the rafters. Directly beneath the tent, villagers build a room and set up a ladder to allow passage in and out of the shroud. On a moon chosen for its propitiousness, a dozen or more women retire to the tent and remain secluded for fifteen days. While there, a woman undergoes transformation into the embodied presence of a *debata* (or spirit) from the sea, a place, incidentally, considered remote and "outside." Eerie tweeting noises and arcane songs float from the shroud. Men, meanwhile, "ignore" the sounds and strange lyrics, and are forbidden to pass to the "downriver" side of the centerpost. On the fifteenth day, the women emerge into public view as *debata* to sing and dance blessings into the home. The ritual winds down as the *debata*-possessed women are splashed with "cooling" water and brought back into a human state.

I have no way of being sure that the tent in *ma'bua' tumba'* is the determining prior text for the "dark shroud" which conceals the mappurondo community. Indeed, funerary practices sometimes require the spouse of the deceased to withdraw behind a shroud at nightfall. Yet the tabus surrounding the former suggest a way to understand the significance of the "dark shroud" and the awe it provokes among those who look upon it, but not in it. For those "not of the shroud," entry is forbid-

den. The presence within may be overheard, perhaps even listened to, but in the end, ignored as a fleeting sound. The image of the dark shroud is thus metaphor for an existence, a reality, apart from the outer world, an imagined fabric of difference. Hidden within, the mappurondo community feels assured that its being-in-the-world is secure, changeless in the face of persistent threats to their culture and identity.

Readers, then, will understand my anxiety and curiosity about *ada' mappurondo*, as well as the anxiety and curiosity of the mappurondo community toward having an ethnographer in their midst. In several settlements, villagers were willing to risk the consequences of my taking part in ritual, though not without some debate or some clever circumlocution.¹³ I recall visiting the mappurondo hamlets in Saludengen and asking the village elders if I might take part in their headhunting ceremonies. Tabus required that I not mention what it was that I wanted to hear and see: "They say the time approaches to go to the sea [a euphemism for headhunting]. And then, who knows, something happens. Maybe it should not be seen, not be heard. But I have eyes and ears, these things [pointing to my camera and tape recorder] too are my eyes and ears." After a minute or two of discussion, an elder gave me words of welcome and consent, albeit oblique ones: *Should a guest come, we offer betel and tobacco. And if a guest did come, why would we take his shoes and long pants?* Calling attention to two other signs of my foreignness, he consented to my wearing camera and recorder. At the same time, his choice of words evaded mention of items outlawed under the shroud of invisibility and inaudibility. Thus, the community of elders decided they would neither see nor hear me at work; I would be enshrouded.

Elsewhere, I was received as friend and kin, and in one case, even was chided for arriving a few days late and missing out on some of the ritual activity. Where my work or presence caused strain, as in a village mentioned earlier, I simply withdrew, determined not to "write up" the community or event in question. And last, there were areas of ritual practice—headhunting journeys, women's search for sacred songs—into which I had no intention of intruding. While curious about them, it was not my place to watch or listen. I have to remain in the dark.

Concluding Remarks

The history of the West's ethnographic presence in highland Sulawesi commenced with the intrusion of Dutch missionaries and patrol officers into the central mountain region at the turn of the century. From the beginning, this ethnography has inscribed a history of local resistance to colonial and postcolonial forces. At times, ethnographers have naturalized their subjects' resistance, as in the case of Dutch linguists who classified upland languages according to the local word for "no." Writing about the *meyapi* (Bare'e: "hidden"), the early twentieth-century millenarian movements reported by Adriani and Kruyt (1913), van der Kroef (1970) would try to root cult activity in a native "proclivity to protest." As I hope I have shown here, cultures of concealment and withdrawal are indeed practical, realistic, and historically determined responses to threatening social forces. Chalking up cultural resistance to native psychology or subsuming it within a "natural" taxonomy of languages not only misses the point, but also signals the failure of ethnographers to recognize their own presence in the creation of anthropological discourse. At the same time, it is a mistake, indeed, to presume that these cultures of concealment appear only in response to a specifically Western presence. To do so reveals an idolatrous faith in the monstrosity of Western colonial or imperial power, a forgetfulness of prior historical forces, and an abys-

mally low estimation of the small community's capacity to shape its own fate.

As an ethnographer, I cannot extricate myself from the varied politics and histories that work through me. Nonetheless, those with whom I lived and worked in highland Sulawesi played a key part in scripting the social and cultural research I was to carry out. Ethnographic reflexivity, in discovery of its partiality and its partial truths, involves a self-consciousness of being-with-an-Other. In writing very, very briefly about secrecy, I have tried to capture the conditions that not only shaped work and text but also constitute an ongoing lived-in reality for a small, remote, and dwindling religious community. As a momentary postscript to that effort, I close with a short passage from a letter from Ambe Uheku, the man who taught me about the raw, the religious, the cooked, and the cultural. Dated in June of 1991 and composed with the help of a Christian writer, the passage reads, translated:

The dances of pa'bisuan are still going on at Salutabang, and please pass this along to friends in America so that they will make a visit to Salutabang. Tourists already have come once to see the dances of pa'bisuan. Please try, so that the dances can get promoted in other lands.

I don't know what prompted Ambe Uheku to change his mind. But his letter underscores the uncertain and shifting terms through which persons and communities conceal and disclose themselves.

NOTES

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¹Some key works that I find particularly helpful or interesting are: Abu-Lughod 1991; Briggs 1986; Clifford 1988a; Diamond 1974; Fabian 1983; Jackson 1989; Narayan 1989; and Tedlock 1983, 1985. For a review of the intellectual milieu from which the critical literature emerged, see Ortnier (1984). In this issue Urciuoli's article on New York Puerto Ricans and Reed-Danahay's article on the Lavallois suggest important

ways of opening up alternate discourses in ethnography.

²I see rescue, however, in the dialogical anthropology of Fabian (1990) and D. Tedlock (1983), and in the work of Rosaldo (1989).

³See Ortnier (1991: 185-187) for a few related cautionary remarks.

⁴Here I am trying to complicate (and to blunt) the critiques of Roger Berger and an anonymous reviewer who respectively portray ethnographers as "cops" and "robbers." For Berger (this issue), ethnographers police the field for secrets being withheld from the panoptic gaze of anthropology. The reviewer meanwhile suggests that the ethnographer is akin to a thief, an appropriator of secrets. These sinister portrayals are not groundless. There are dangers in the "will to know." Yet Berger and the reviewer seem to presume that the terms of ethnographic exchange are fixed within an unshifting field of social and political relations. Further, "secrets" in the formulation of Berger and the reviewer appear as objective facts, rather than as social, cultural, and historical constructions. For a general background on the ethical dilemmas in dealing with secrecy, see Bok (1983).

⁵For discussion of the politics of representation among the Sa'dan Toraja see: Volkman (1985, 1990) and Adams (1984).

⁶Anthropologists Carmen Burch and Jeannine Koubi had

travelled through the Salu Mambi area in the late 1970s, but had yet to write up their reports. Burch would eventually work in the ToMakki' (ToMangki') settlements to the north, and Koubi would focus on the Sa'dan and Mamasa Toraja, dismissing Salu Mambi ritual life as un-Torajan (Koubi 1982). I learned of their work after beginning fieldwork.

⁷Jane Atkinson's work on the Wana (1984, 1989) offers rich comparative materials on concealment in another part of Sulawesi.

⁸My remarks are shaped and adapted from passages in Gerald Bruns' essay "The New Philosophy" (1988: 1056-1058).

⁹The clever will insist that it is the same.

¹⁰It would be a few years later before I began to brood

about the way in which had I created and disclosed secrets in my fieldwork and writing. For a brief discussion of secrecy as a governing trope in fieldwork and ethnographic texts, see Clifford (1988a).

¹¹The water buffalo—the grandest sacrificial animal—is often taken as the image of *ada' mappurondo*.

¹²The transposability, or metaphorical application, of sexual and intercultural politics in the mappurondo community is not limited to this instance. For interested readers, I have explored the "allegorical resonance" of sexual politics and intercultural polemics in a study of song interpretation (George n.d.).

¹³For an insightful and important treatment of indirection, see Brenneis (1987).