Autodesignation - or the Limits of Understanding.

This contribution is based on more than five years’ research in the eastern mountains of Westpapua and on "rethinking" the relationship between individuals, clans, ethnic groups, on the one hand, and the state, on the other. - In primordial times the interconvertability of noumena and phenomena (see Urban) was established and assured: space was socially meaningful, references to ego and the social group could fade into each other, "ego" could be veiled, and the limits of the intelligible space were the limits of the meaningful universe. Contacts with the missions and with "the government" were experienced as "giving new names to persons and institutions". However, the interconvertability was no longer guaranteed. The names were empty. The processes of acculturation and globalisation drain traditional discourse and de-centre egohood. Unnoticed, law was transformed, the sayings of the ancestors developing into bans uttered by other people, namely the mission and the administration. Thinking that guided acculturation is possible was a big mistake made by members of the big German interdisciplinary research project in the eastern mountains of Westpapua.

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