
This ethnographic contribution has a brevity, simplicity, and charm that mask the sophistication, the scholarship, the masterly handling of highly complex material, and the sheer hard work that went into its preparation and writing.

At one level it is readable, accessible, jargon free, enjoyable, in the tradition of the best anthropological writing. It will therefore meet the needs of senior students, scholars, anthropologists generally, and a wide swath of serious readers with an interest in the Pacific. At quite another level it is tackling a range of theoretical, conceptual, methodological, and professional anthropological matters of great significance, not only for Pacific anthropology but for the discipline generally. It would be an excellent book to serve as a first introduction for students to the “real” stuff of ethnography, after the introductory textbook has done its best or its worst.

In 1977, Borofsky went to the still remote, tiny coral atoll of Pukapuka, (Danger Island, as it was once called), one of the northern Cook group. He spent over three years there with his wife and family, serving his apprenticeship in field anthropology. He chose this island because in 1934 Ernest and Pearl Beaglehole had gone there as a research team, part of the Bishop Museum salvage anthropology pro-
this precise change. Yet the people of Pukapuka claimed it was just something they did from time to time. Some said it had happened before, in their youth. What does an anthropologist do, when he suspects that the people are constructing culture before his very eyes—making it up, or, in the words of the book’s title, “making history”? What Borofsky has done is plunge into the problem with zest and with all his trained senses on the alert, tuned toward information and understanding. That is the excitement of the book; it is a detective story exploring the whole significance of the event and its layered cultural meanings. The ethnography is written as though the author were peeling off the onion skins of culture, layer by layer, till he reached the core—only to find that the layers are the onion. There is no core!

There should be no question about competence here. Borofsky was clearly not being taken in by smart and clever informants. Polynesians just aren’t like that. And his informants were not liars, cheats, or confused. Something culturally logical and consistent was going on, and the author set out first to discover what it was and then to lead others to understand it too.

This technique gives a strong sense of movement in the culture, of its adaptive responses. One leaves the book with the knowledge that a dynamic culture is moving on and with the sense of being privileged just to have glimpsed it at one point in time. Gone is the ethnographic present. Gone the sense of culture encapsulated, frozen like ants in amber. At one level this is an essay in the cultural uses of history. In the oral tradition (as Westerners conceive it), the emphasis is supposed to be on accuracy of transmission because this is the only record of the past that the people possess. But tribal people need history to validate their current needs and affairs; they use it, change it, mythologize it, unfold it into the future like a mat on which to hold current conversations. They also people their history with personalized characters and interpretations, editorializing and vivifying it. In it they find role models, strategies, and the adapted tribal wisdom. But without adaptations, it would be meaningless.

This volume is an important contribution to the theory of social change. Over thirty years ago Margaret Mead, returning from her restudy of Manus, reported that the era of salvage anthropology was over and that we should all now “attempt to understand ourselves and take the future of our descendants safely in our hands” (Letters from the Field, 1925–1975, 1977). The Manus had taken their future into their own hands and she accused her profession of “esthetic nostalgia.” The Manus were reading her book about them; awareness of change was vastly accelerating change itself.

Borofsky has the same message. Cultural inventions that are consistent with central cultural messages are likely to be integrative, and adoptions from others can be woven into the existing fabric by processes that, if not obstructed, will not disrupt. The model of change Borofsky employed is centripetal, to use Sapir’s term; his model of society emphasizes fluidity, adaptability, change by choice rather than social and cultural stasis.

That fits very well with what other
ethnographers of Polynesia, such as Sahlins and Shore, have been saying. There is a different quality about cultures that place a value on the accept­ance of change, and Polynesian cultures demonstrate this quality. Their apparent emphasis on received status, cultural conservation, and traditional rigidity is a cover; what Polynesians are really up to is survival by assimilation, not by being assimilated. Pukapuka, Borofsky has shown, has these qualities even though it is geographically isolated from direct day-to-day con­tact.

The book is also a contribution to the ethnology of education and learning styles. How do Polynesians transmit knowledge? Two important chapters, which discuss the transmission of traditional knowledge and its validation, are essays, quite graphically illustrated, on Pukapukan learning style. Much of this material is not entirely new, since Alan Howard (who supervised the work), has written on the topic for both Rotuma and his Hawai­ian field station at Nanakuli (Learning to Be Rotuman, 1970; Ain’t No Big Thing, 1974). We now know quite a lot about learning styles in the general culture area, and the field records are remarkably consistent.

Borofsky’s central issue was the exploration of the questions, How do Pukapukans come to believe that they know something? How do they know that something is true? How do they transmit cultural truths? What happens to those truths in the process? But the book is also about how Borofsky came to know that these were the “right” questions, as well as about the answers he found. He squirrels his way through these pages asking cheeky questions, challenging his informants, reporting what each said to him and to others, testing the risk that his informants might be making it up, finding that sometimes they do, recognizing that this is also a cultural activity.

Among other things, this raises the problem of consistency. It is, of course, very irritating to the trained ethnographic mind to find that informants are inconsistent, or can’t remember, or present rationalizations or reconstruc­tions as though they are verified historical events. But whose problem is that? Ever since Redfield wrote about the “this” and the “that” of culture, in his book The Little Community (1960), we have had to deal with this question. In the Polynesian case, the fieldworker is confronted with cultures that fashion and exploit ambiguity in a variety of ways in order to create cultural conundrums. This is Bateson territory—Gregory would certainly have enjoyed Making History.

Finally, there is the question of the role, and the “objectivity,” of the eth­nographer. When the Beagleholes wrote Ethnology of Pukapuka (1938) they were required by the ethos of the anthropology of their day to put themselves out of the picture. So well did they do this that they subsequently wrote another book Islands of Danger (1944), a personal account of the fieldwork, from which they emerge as human beings with human needs, enjoying fieldwork, being irritated and bored by it, and all the rest. Borofsky has made no attempt to excise himself from the processes. He has asked the questions, sifting and evaluating the answers, to inform the reader.
BOOK REVIEWS

From this we can see the anthropologist looking at the people who are looking at the anthropologist. Borofsky was acutely aware that what he was doing was not of the people's culture but about both theirs and his own and the culture of anthropology as well. He has told how Pukapukans construct their reality and at the same time shown how he constructed his reality concerning their reality. His last chapter is a reflection of anthropological ways of knowing—fresh, open, accessible.

Borofsky's discussion of how the Pukapukans value the Beaglehole ethnography as an account of themselves will in time be echoed in his own work for he has presented Pukapukans to themselves without condescension or concession. His informants would surely agree with his statement, "part of the reason for the differing accounts . . . stems from my being too curious. I asked too many questions." To his credit, no one could possibly think that this ethnography is any the worse for it.

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This massive document is the first systematic review of the Solomon Islands constitution since it was enacted by the British parliament in 1978. Criticism of the politicians who formed a majority of the review committee made them publish the evidence and background papers that led, they say, to their recommendations. The three volumes are a fascinating source of material on Solomon Islands political culture, and raise wider questions about participation, popular authoritarianism, federalism, the rights of indigenous people, and the role of constitutions. Many of the documents and recommendations bear the strong imprint of the ideas of one of the country's most original politicians, Solomon Mamaloni, who chaired the committee.

The first volume, Evidence, records the 151 oral and written submissions made to the committee, mainly by individuals, but also by groups of "chiefs," professional associations, and government departments. Only one submission was made by a political party (the People's Alliance Party)—perhaps an indicator of the irrelevance of parties in the Solomons political system. The volume also includes 14 "tour reports" of the visits made by committee members to public meetings in most parts of the country. Some of the reports provide an engaging diary of the trip: rows over cabin allocations, "very filling" breakfasts, meetings skipped because local people were in mourning, and a submission so long that it covered seven blackboards.

The results are summarized, if somewhat slanted, as the "people's views" in Volume 2, Background Papers. It also includes an interim report, seeking an extension of time and money; a summary of the provisions of the existing constitution, and the questionnaire used during public meetings; a summary of the written and oral submissions; a paper on