

The Mundugumor: From the Field Notes of Margaret Mead and Reo Fortune, by Nancy McDowell. Smithsonian Series in Ethnographic Inquiry. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991. ISBN 1-56098-062-1, xiii + 337 pp, tables, diagrams, maps, photographs, notes, bibliography, index. US\$45.

Of the possibilities created by Margaret Mead's superb Sepik trip-tych, *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies* (1935-1963), perhaps the least attractive group to American sensibility was the "actively masculine" Mundugumor. Certainly Mead herself had mixed feelings about these "cheerfully disobedient" people. To social anthropologists, such as Levi-Strauss, the Mundugumor proved the most interesting of the three because of their totally anomalous system of descent. Nancy McDowell, the distinguished ethnographer of one of the neighboring upriver groups, has assembled the unpublished field notes Mead and Reo Fortune made during two and one-half months of fieldwork they did among the Mundugumor in 1932.

Now obviously Mead's ghost has taken a few hits since her death in 1978. McDowell, however, is "kin." Having promised Mead on her deathbed to get this material out, she uses the book as a vehicle to confirm the organization, speed, and tirelessness of Mead as a field-worker. Of Mead's accuracy, McDowell finds little to quibble with either. Mead, she believes, was an "extraordinary observer of human phenomena" (19). One of the minor subplots of the book, a degenerating marriage between Mead and Fortune, leads McDowell astray a bit here.

Whatever they may not have been communicating emotionally, I would never diminish Fortune's contribution to Mead's powers as McDowell appears to have done by omission.

McDowell also supports Mead's configurationalist argument about the ethos of the culture in both the details she adds from two weeks she spent in 1981 with the people, as well as through the supplementary information she provides from her own fieldwork upriver. Inevitably, Mead falls short theoretically. The concept of culture that Mead assumed was too simple and reductionist; her notion of "deviance" unfortunate. But it did not compromise her ethnography in this case. And, I agree, here lies the value of this book, especially since McDowell has chosen to fashion it around this corpus of material with minimal inter-linear.

The chapters of the book are long but even so feel flooded with fascinating "new" information. In the chapter on religion, for example, one learns quite a bit more about the striking birth sequence staged by the "crocodile mother" during male initiation when novices are made to run a gauntlet of men cutting them with the skulls of baby crocodiles. Among the many stunning points about the status of women in this deeply androgynous society, one learns more fully about the reproduction theory. Above all, and perhaps this is the major plot of the book, one learns a great deal more about the role of exchange in classificatory affinal relationships as they work their way into virtually all dimensions of Mundugumor cosmology, gender, and personhood.

One might go ahead and call this

book encyclopaedic in the style of the Human Relations Area Files World Culture series were it not for what McDowell must be the centerpiece of the book. This is a reinterpretation—rather than a refutation—of Mead’s analysis of reciprocity and the brother-sister relationship in the social structure. The society was said to consist of landholding patrilines and corporate groups the people called “ropes.” “Rope” relations were paired. They were composed of generations of cross-sex kin, mothers, sons, and daughters on one side and fathers, daughters, and sons on the other. McDowell’s reinterpretation basically is that these “ropes” were not descent groups but a “complex interweaving of relationships and ties that began and ended with brother-sister exchange marriage” (269).

In McDowell’s summary judgment of Mead as anthropologist, the possibility of reinterpretation demonstrates that Mead had astonishing powers of observation and was ahead of her time. Her Mundugumor material is richer than her theory. And what of the sexes in Mundugumor? By the 1980s, they still had their clans and “ropes” but the men were now chartering airplanes to sell betel nuts and tobacco to Highlanders instead of making war and initiating youth. Of the women, unfortunately, McDowell adds nothing, except to say that she saw a game of coed basketball going on while she was there. No pathos here.

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Decentralization in a Developing Country: The Experience of Papua New Guinea and Its Health Service, edited by Jane A. Thomason, William C. Newbrander, and Riita-Liisa Kolehmainen-Aitken. Pacific Research Monograph no. 25. Canberra: National Centre for Development Studies, Australian National University, 1991. ISBN 0-7315-0940-4, ISSN 0155-9060, x + 162 pp, tables, bibliography, index. A\$25.

When, in 1975, Papua New Guinea gained independence, the new nation inherited an administrative dilemma of its colonial past—centralization versus regional rule. In the past, the authority of the Australian administrator in Port Moresby was tempered by the reality of actual administration by district officers, the true lords of their isolated domains. For both the old colonial and the newly independent government, centralized political control was made difficult by the cultural and linguistic fragmentation of Papua New Guinea’s peoples (some 700 distinct languages), and the difficulties of travel and communication in the largely roadless, mostly rugged terrain.

This dilemma was epitomized in the health system of the Australian colonial era. There was the big man in Port Moresby, the director of health services, who formulated policy, oversaw the few general hospitals, and recruited expatriate staff. There were also major national health programs, notably, from the mid-1950s to its collapse in the early 1970s, the National Malaria Eradication Program. However, the main dispensers of health care at the “people” level were the reasonably well-trained, intrepid medical assist-