
Rarely does the primary title of a book so neatly capture both its central themes and its dilemmas. Terry Hays has cajoled a set of fieldwork reminiscences from the first wave of professional anthropologists to enter the Papua New Guinea Highlands, an exercise in salvage autobiography rendered all the more timely by the recent deaths of two of the contributors. The result is a volume charged through with a sense of history that is so often lacking in the ethnographies of the region. Hays, in an introductory chapter, draws on his encyclopedic grasp of the literature to provide a concise overview of the exploration of the Papua New Guinea Highlands by miners, missionaries, and administrators from the 1920s through to the 1950s. He summarizes neatly both the abortive prewar efforts by a handful of professional and missionary anthropologists, and the gathering of the research storm, based largely in Sydney and Canberra, that was to see almost a dozen anthropologists enter the Highlands region between 1951 and 1955. The context for anthropological research provided by the colonial administration, deftly sketched here by Hays, emerges as a critical theme throughout the volume.

The list of the other contributors is a veritable pantheon of early Highlands ethnographers, including almost half of the anthropologists who worked in the Highlands region between the 1930s and the mid-1950s. There are chapters by Ronald Berndt, Catherine Berndt, Marie Reay, James Watson, D'Arcy Ryan, and Robert Glasse and a chapter by Reo Fortune's niece, Ann Mclean, on Fortune's two little-known field visits to the Kamano in 1935 and 1951–52. A check on the roll of those missing from the volume (among them Beatrice Blackwood, Paul Wirz, Ralph Bulmer, Richard Salisbury, and Francis Williams), throws up only three of the "first wave" who are still alive: Kenneth Read, Mervyn Meggitt, and Virginia Watson, and, of these, both Read and Meggitt might fairly claim to have published their field reminiscences elsewhere. The volume thus makes a claim to thoroughness that is well supported by the detail of the individual testimonies.

Each of these central chapters traces a route from pre-fieldwork training and expectations through to initial encounters and the mutual process of familiarization between ethnographers and local communities. Here are fascinating accounts of the sometimes halting development of the key themes known to us from the authors' publications: Glasse's description of his difficulties in understanding Huli social structure either as "an agnatic system..."
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that was breaking down, or a cognatic system in transition to unilineality,” nicely illustrates the confused confrontation of “African” models with intractable Highlands subjects. Reay and Ryan, in particular, are open both in recalling the limitations of their theoretical backgrounds and in their criticism of what they felt to be the undue and often crushing influence of their “god-professors” Nadel and Elkin.

There is little that is new in terms of ethnographic data here; the more interesting themes and telling insights emerge through the anecdotes, which reveal a world familiar in some respects to any current ethnographer of the region (Ryan’s delightful sketch of the problems of posing hypothetical questions), while totally alien in others (Fortune shooting a Kamano man in the leg and then paying him compensation at the going colonial rate of sixpence).

Ann McLean’s working up of Reo Fortune’s Kamano field notes is the outstanding contribution in this volume, reflecting both the fluency of her own writing, the sense of critical distance afforded by her unusual and rewarding perspective, and the stark contrast between Fortune’s prewar experiences and those of his own and others’ postwar fieldwork. Fortune’s first period of Kamano fieldwork, starting in February 1935, lasted only six months, until the sheer level of intercommunity warfare forced him to quit the region. He returned, as his brother recalled, with no less than seventeen facial tics. The clear lesson was that ethnography could be conducted only after the complete suppression of warfare by the administration, a process that was not without what Hays quaintly refers to as its “seamier aspects.” The postwar ethnographers eagerly pursued the advancing colonial frontier, but always from within the administration’s “controlled zones,” a point made wryly by Ryan, who was able to attend the Mendi Timp cult only through the intercession of a patrol officer. Even in the 1950s, however, there was a sense of both the precontact dynamism of the social landscape and the dramatic changes that had followed “pacification,” with both warfare and major group migration severely curtailed. This dual sense of the past prompted James Watson to make his infamous “Ipomoean Revolution” sally into speculative history. But if local social landscapes were thus frozen by the colonial authorities, the ethnographers might be said subsequently to have embalmed them. The use and abuse of the “ethnographic present” in past and current Highlands ethnography still awaits a comprehensive critique. The revival of major intergroup warfare during the 1980s has had the effect of recasting the “ethnographic present” of the 1960s and 1970s, which dominates our understanding of the region, as a brief and uncharacteristic interlude in an otherwise continuous (but not unchanging) history of conflict and migration.

Andrew Strathern, one of the more prominent members of the “second wave” that followed on the heels of these pioneers, considers the legacy of this first wave in a concluding chapter. He makes the point that historical contexts for research are themselves critical, reflecting on the complex influences of the first wave on his own
work while commenting in passing on the difficulty of searching back through the history of his own intellectual path to some initial baseline. This very richness of autobiographic detail, a feature of the volume as a whole, exposes what Johannes Fabian has identified in *Time and the Other* as a form of double play in ethnographic writing: the ability of finely temporalized ethnographers to "move" through the static time of the Other. Of the four vectors of temporal experience relating to ethnography that Strathern lists (the time of the lives of individual ethnographers, of the lives of individual subjects, in the history of anthropology, and of "the life of the people studied, as a historical matter"), this volume marks an important moment in our analysis of the first. But the last remains largely unaddressed in Highlands ethnography.

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Brison’s ethnography of Inakor village in the East Sepik Province of Papua New Guinea explores two opposed, sharply contrasting but interrelated circuits of political communication. One is constituted by open, public discussion in meetings, and the other by private, secretive talk in the form of gossip and rumor. The character and consequences of their opposition are a topic of great interest to the Kwanga themselves, as Brison’s meticulous account makes clear, and in the most general sense the structural tension between openness and secrecy poses a significant problem for every egalitarian form of social organization. Brison’s analysis demonstrates, however, that these modes of discourse are two sides of the coin of Kwanga community life, each in some measure defining itself in terms of, and drawing content from, the other.

Brison argues that Kwanga leaders —along with virtually all players in the community political process—consciously employ both forms of communication in pursuit of power and influence. They attempt to manage people’s impressions of events, thereby influencing actions based on those impressions, through public speech-making but also by strategic use of gossip, rumor, and innuendo. By focusing her analysis on both forms of discourse and on their functional interrelationships, Brison makes a valuable contribution to the balance of emphasis between the two in the growing ethnographic literature on talk and conflict in the Pacific. Contributors to two important collections on this topic, Brenneis and Myers’ *Dangerous Words* (1984) and Watson-Gegeo and White’s *Disentangling* (1990), have suggested the relevance of private, offstage talk in conflict management, but with only a few exceptions they have concentrated their research efforts on the more public forms of conflict talk and have not dealt fully with gossip and ordinary conversation. In the broader academic