

for soiling the village. In a brilliant tour-de-force the author shows how these and other measures conflicted with one another in practice, often forcing officials to revise and modify policies every few years. Such frequent policy changes not only confused the villagers, but also demonstrated how complicated systematic development programs are in real-world situations. Schoorl, who was himself part of the colonial apparatus, presents this material dispassionately around a series of themes. By the time one reaches his closing summary, the true complexity of this case study and the interconnected character of these various issues is quite clear. This case study offers many lessons, both for policymakers and those involved in development programs. It also offers excellent case material for use in courses about rural development and culture change.

This unpretentious volume is not a gripping ethnographic narrative, even when the author's findings are striking and different from observations elsewhere in Melanesia. Some readers may feel the book is only another run-of-the-mill 1950s ethnography, heavy on description and weak on modern theory. But what this work lacks in theoretical orientation is more than made up for by its rich data, most of which will continue to withstand the test of time for many decades to come.

My one criticism of this book concerns the mediocre quality of the translation, which makes Schoorl's text seem labored, too formal, and slightly off balance. Originally written as a doctoral thesis, this book is naturally somewhat formal in style. But the original Dutch is more relaxed, smooth,

and flowing than the English translation. Nevertheless, this is a work that has long been ignored by American and British anthropologists and deserves much more attention. Its publication offers a rare opportunity to see some of the contradictions and complexities of Dutch colonialism in the twentieth century, analyzed in a useful and refreshing manner.

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*South Coast New Guinea Cultures: History, Comparison, Dialectic*, by Bruce M. Knauff. Cambridge Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology 89. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. ISBN 0-521-41882-8 (cloth), 0-521-42931-5 (paper), xii + 298 pages, maps, tables, figures, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. Cloth, US\$54.95; paper, US\$18.95.

Although it has nurtured generations of ethnographers, New Guinea has been inhospitable to comparative work. The ethnography has supported theoretical debates, but these mostly take place with a few privileged instances and leave us to wonder how things would look with different examples. More ambitious comparisons have fared badly: Rubel and Rosman's analysis of exchange (1978) was ignored, Feil's speculations on Highlands evolution (1987) drew immediate fire, and the kudos for Strathern's *Gender of the Gift* (1988) quickly faded into bemused silence.

Against this background, Knauff tackles the problem of comparison in

New Guinea. One of his aims is to avoid the pitfalls of rigged analyses that select cases for theoretical fit, and his opening move is to frame his work in *regional* terms by focusing on the cultures of New Guinea's south coast. This approach has a strong Boasian flavor and banks on keeping arguments honest by an implicit appeal to shared histories rather than selected typological features. Knauft knows that delimiting a region poses its own problems, and he settles on a combination of geographic, ecological, and linguistic features to define south coast cultures as a band of coastal non-Austronesian speakers including, among others, the Asmat, Kolopom, Marind, Trans-Fly, and Elema. This selection has the virtue of acquainting contemporary readers with a body of neglected ethnography, but this innocent-looking solution conceals its own quirks of inclusion and exclusion, as we shall see.

The middle section of the book, "Critique," is where Knauft warms to a favorite theme, the idea that south coast ethnography has been pressed into service as theory fodder without much regard for the complexities of the evidence. His strategy is to use south coast cultures as a yardstick for evaluating propositions about sexuality, gender, and political economy in Melanesia, a procedure that yields up a satisfying inventory of exceptions. In the four chapters making up this section Knauft dismantles a number of generalizations and engages a range of contemporary discussions, with Herdt's notion of a zone of homosexual societies in New Guinea at the top of the list. Taking issue with the reifi-

cation of ritualized homosexuality as a marker for south coast cultures, Knauft argues that such practices were less widespread than recent discussions allow; he shows instead that they were part of a more general pattern of ritualized sexuality in which heterosexual forms predominated. In one of the book's more thoughtful passages, Knauft suggests that our preoccupation with discourses of sexuality and normalcy made it tactically convenient to essentialize south coast cultures as normatively gay. The resulting fixation then became the focus of elaborate frameworks purporting to explain what makes these cultures tick.

Two chapters on political economy and women's status follow, each seeking to dissolve analytic typologies in the acid bath of south coast ethnography. Knauft argues that characterizations of these cultures in terms of small societal scale and low-intensity production fit poorly with the ethnographic facts, while feasting and ceremonial exchange played a larger role in south coast social life than is usually recognized. Here he claims that most workers exaggerate differences between south coast cultures and those of the central Highlands while masking differences between south coast cultures and those of the interior lowlands. This positions him to criticize Godelier's contrast between political systems based on warfare and men's ritual (Great Man systems) and those based on ceremonial exchange (Big Man systems), arguing that south coast cultures blur the distinction by displaying features belonging to both types. Similarly, Knauft argues that Whitehead's typology of gender and cult

forms imposes an artificial clarity on complex and ambiguous arrays of facts.

The book's final section, "Reconfiguration," offers Knauft's own attempts to understand south coast cultures and their dynamics. His starting point is that these cultures should each be examined as integral cultural formations rather than as sets of typological features: sound but incongruous advice, given the atomistic tenor of Knauft's critiques. He goes on to argue that recent work has neglected the ways in which cultural schemes are deployed in a world of constraints, and this becomes the central theme for a detailed reanalysis of Marind-Anim ethnography. Here Knauft follows van Baal, who argued that fertility rites and headhunting were part of a feedback loop in which kidnapping in raids became increasingly necessary to offset the demographic effects of infertility caused by ritual intercourse. While this much is familiar territory, Knauft's subsequent chapter goes further by viewing particular features of the Kolopom and Trans-Fly formations as responses to Marind raiding, a perspective that makes a strong case for viewing historical processes in regional rather than typological terms. Finally, he argues that the underlying strategy of south coast social reproduction focused on the symbolic management of "life-force" through headhunting and ritualized sexuality. The last chapter steps back from ethnographic specifics to consider Knauft's picture of south coast cultures against material from other areas and restates his argument for an analysis of the empirical actualization of symbolic orientations.

Knauft is a severe critic, and this invites questions about his own practice. Why, for example, is his south coast region configured as it is? As non-headhunters without ritualized sexuality, the Elema fit poorly into the range of south coast cultures, as Knauft acknowledges. Since the Elema are star exceptions to a number of theoretical generalizations, their inclusion seems fishy when set beside the corresponding exclusion of nearby headhunting peoples such as the Jaqai, Boazi, or Yei-nan. Elsewhere, particular interpretations seem tendentious, as when serial intercourse counts as a plus for Marind women's status, despite evidence that some sought to resist it. Finally, it was disappointing to see political economy and women's status allocated to separate chapters when recent approaches seek to integrate the two. Despite these problems, however, Knauft is in one sense surely right: Melanesianist debates have had it far too easy, and *South Coast New Guinea Cultures* should both broaden and complicate the picture by enriching our sense of how much comparative evidence there is to take into account. This may not be entirely welcome, but then that goes with the territory.

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