REVIEW ARTICLE

MELANESIAN MEDLEY

ANDRÉ ITEANU, *La ronde des échanges: De la circulation aux valeurs chez les Orokaiva,* Cambridge and Paris: Cambridge University Press and Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme 1983. xix, 288 pp., Bibliography, Glossary, Index, Photographs. 120FF.

GILBERT H. HERDT (ed.), *Rituals of Manhood: Male Initiation in Papua New Guinea,* Berkeley etc.: University of California Press 1982. xxvi, 355pp., Maps, References, Index, Photographs. £24.50.

ROGER M. KEESING, *Kwaio Religion: The Living and the Dead in a Solomon Island Society,* New York: Columbia University Press 1982. xi, 246pp., Glossary, References, Index, Photographs. No price.

ANNA S. MEIGS, *Food, Sex and Pollution: A New Guinean Religion,* New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press 1984. xix, 136pp., Appendixes, Bibliography, Glossary, Index. $22.50.

PETER LAWRENCE, *The Garia: An Ethnography of a Traditional Cosmic System in Papua New Guniea,* Manchester: Manchester University Press 1984. xxv, 261pp., Bibliography, Index, Photographs. £24.50.

Is Melanesia the first post-structuralist civilization? Or are traditional Melanesians 'uncivilized' structuralists, seemingly capricious *bricoleurs* ignoring the formal strictures of ageing Parisian greats? Are they logical glue-sniffers? Or are they livers of leaky wholes lacking in conceptual adhesive? Can such creative individualists be bound by hard-back ethnography? And who is bound: the locale or the field-worker? Is Melanesia to

be the anthropologists' whipping-post, a suitable home for masochistic intellectuals? So many questions, so much (recently published) ethnography, so many answers. Just what is going on?

But first, the best of the bunch. The dry husk of Iteanu's *Ronde* is a methodological introduction and an appendix of myths enclosing the meaty kernel of the book: groups of men centred around coconut palm trees, linked by name to place, by exchange to members of other categories, the whole given ghostly frame - the ever-absent presence of the spirits. Finding form in ritual, Iteanu places all Orokaiva ideology in the ritual cycle. All acts, all social facts are interpreted as a function of their position within this cycle. Parts only have meaning in relation to this ceremonial whole. In the first part of *La Ronde* he describes post-natal ceremonies, initiations and wakes, and he elucidates the fundamental opposition of forest : village (:: wild : domesticated :: home of spirits : home of men). Garden is tricky middle-ground, an ambivalent spot where pigs eat taro, men kill pigs, and the spirits are - sometimes - kept at bay. Over all, the spirits hover. Exchange, in Iteanu's account, is central - its types, times, content and conceptual typology. The spirits, by giving men pigs, provide them with the means to perpetuate both relations between villages and those between individuals. Men, by transforming their immediate exchange with the spirits into a differed one, gain time within which to play out their lives. The big-man is reduced to pulsive initiator of the societal motor: as though the culture was put on automatic pilot and the big-man had his foot on the accelerator. A driven personality indeed.

The second part shows how 'patrilineages', 'clans', plant emblems, land tenure, kinship terminology and marriage must be understood in terms of their relation to the ritual cycle and *not* vice versa. Iteanu extricates the priority of the brother-sister relation in social organisation and the way in which it articulates the circulation of exchanges. Incest, he shows, is merely part of the marriage rules, not a generator of society. In a closing chapter, he unites the results of his analysis around a 'superior value': *tendre vers la reciprocité* (p. 283). Types of relation are oriented about this value and a unified model of Orokaiva society is so constructed. It's all very neat and very nicely done.

La ronde des échanges is ethnographic analysis at its best. The poverty of my précis hides the rich subtlety of his sustained incisiveness. The occasional symbolic interpretation may seem too imaginative a leap to some but is justified in relation to the revelatory whole of his text. I will not carp over quibbles, for there are bigger fish to catch.

Iteanu, a member of the Dumont/de Coppet *équipe*, sees his work as an extension of his mentors' teachings. Dumont discusses hierarchy (in India) and de Coppet gives it temporal expression. Iteanu is concerned to divide Orokaiva categories into 'levels' and then to rank them - hierarchically: one level 'englobes' another, one opposition is 'subordinate' to another. In the closing pages he gives his three-level hierarchy: superior, where spirits are consubstantial to the Orokaiva world; inferior, where men create the different social unities; lowest level, that of

relation between individuals (pp. 286-7). But why stop here? Couldn't the model be given a fourth level by adducing the relations *within* individuals? Do not the different parts of the body have to be in harmony for life to proceed? Or how is illness discussed? And do we even need a metaphor of verticality? What more does it tell us? Couldn't it be replaced by a flat spatial metaphor, or by one of concentric globes, or by a one-dimensional metaphor (e.g. overlapping bars or concentric holes of varying depth)? Can Iteanu's arbitrary spatial metaphor of two-dimensional elevation even be said to have comparative value, when the senses of 'hierarchy' and 'inversion' in Indian castes and Melanesian rituals are so different? Do we (as I suspect) lose nothing when this theoretical frame, this dry husk, is discarded? Comparison may be the point of social anthropology, but precipitate juxtaposition may conceal the distinctiveness of the very areas compared.

These comments do not affect the achievements of the book's kernel, which withstands comparison with the best of modern ethnographies of Melanesia, and whose ideas fully deserve comparison within Melanesia.

Herdt's edition is one of blood, sweat and tears: the initiates' blood, the initiators' sweat and the fieldworkers' tears. For this is the ethnography of beating, nose-bleeding, scarring, forced vomiting, fellatio, sodomy, pus-eating, serial sex, penis incising, ear- and nose-piercing, and judicial murder. Painful stuff, both for the locals and the reader. Little wonder the fieldworkers begin to ponder ethics.

After a preface by Herdt, Keesing provides a summary introduction. He draws out the recurrent themes of New Guinean male initiation that are concerned with the physiological opposition between the sexes' powers and essences: the restriction of men's contact with the emanations of women's generative powers; the symbolic portrayal of the sexes' powers and essences as both parallel and antithetical; that girls become women, but boys must be made into men. Damning any simple-minded argument from ecological adaptation, Marxist theory, functionalist sociology, or Freudianism, Keesing attempts a programmatic synthesis: not an unconnected collection of partial explanations drawn from different paradigms, but an integrated set dynamically grounded on warfare, population increase and intensification of production. In a climate of combat, traumatic initiations dramatically separate boys from females and turn them into sturdy masculine characters prepared to fight.

Herdt opens the collection with a paper on fetish and fantasy in the initiation rituals of the Sambia of the Eastern Highlands. Hays and Hays give a rounded picture of the opposition and complementarity of the sexes among the Ndumba (also Eastern Highlands) by analysing both a male initiation ceremony and one held for girls at their first menstruation. Newman and Boyd describe the ritual preparation of women and the making of men among the Awa (again, Eastern Highlands); during initiation, men learn techniques to

manipulate their bodily substances, which immunize them against the perils of swiving and allow them to establish 'the necessary complementary relationships of married life' (p. 283). Gewertz contributes a subtle paper on how an analysis of the role of the central characters in Chambri initiation illuminates the articulation of their social categories. Schieffelin argues convincingly that though the ceremonial hunting lodge of Kaluli bachelors (*bau a*) may appear an initiation programme at first sight, it is not, since its performance causes no formal change in status and since novices do not have to depend on sponsors or initiators. Graduates of the lodge do not submit to socially formative ordeals; they are not reincorporated into a new structural position in society, rather they bestow a prestation on society, placing themselves, implicitly and symbolically, in the position of marriage allies through the making of a grand prestation. Thus the *bau a* 'strives to establish a relationship between the youths and the elder members of Kaluli society on the model of *alliance*' (p. 197, original emphasis).

Tuzin's paper on ritual violence among the Ilahita Arapesh describes the continuing conflict men feel between their attachment to their wives and children and the antagonism they must prescriptively display towards them. For men (surprisingly) are sceptical about the status of beliefs concerning the local version of the Tambaran cult and recognize the sometimes purely pragmatic nature of ritual acts. To senior initiates, the cult is just 'what men do' (p. 349), one whose artifice they must - to their embarrassment - eventually reveal to more junior initiates. This is ritual as drug, with the Arapesh as 'cultural addicts' (p. 350): continuing these customs pains them, but giving them up would be even more painful.

Many of the papers in this collection try to provide an ethnography of ritual experience, to draw out both the affective aspect of symbolism and individual psychology from cultural experience - a stress on the interconnexion of cognition and emotion that promises to give a more representative picture of many Melanesian modes of thought. Some contributors fall into the easy trap of a facile psychoanalysis (no matter how 'sophisticated'), letting 'primary and secondary anxiety','Oedipal conflict' and 'male envy' interfere with their ethnography. Anthropologists, rather than imposing crudely in this way, need to depict a native theory of the emotions, an account of indigenous forms of feeling and their ritual expression. So the pearl of these papers is the piece by Poole on the ritual forging of identity among the Bimin-Kuskusmin (West Sepik). There, initiators emphasize the physiological consequences of the intense ritual experience undergone by the novices. In these rites, the intensity of the novices' experience of self is a major criterion of ritual efficacy. Poole reconstructs the novices' views by use of in-depth interviews both before and after the rite, dream reports, draw-a-person exercises and Rorschach tests. The mutually confirmative results of these enquiries uncover the enormously traumatic nature of the ritual and how much of the trauma is focused on bodily injury, and on body parts and effluvia. The ritual sensationally separates boys from females and starts to make them men: an explicit contrast of gender which 'is often coded in bodily

imagery and its behavioural entailments. And, these entailments have their subjective dimensions' (p.150). It is a real strength of Poole's sensitivity that we gain some idea of those dimensions.

Dealing with affect is a tricky business, as anyone in love knows. Some of Herdt's contributors have the moral fortitude and sufficient strength of character to describe these customs for what they are: unpleasant, cruel, at times vicious and sadistic. These fieldworkers do not shrink from displaying their discomfort before these disagreeable traditions. Rather, they exhibit their necessary sensitivity by incorporating the role of emotion into their studies. It is for this reason, above all, that these ethnographically rich papers deserve to be read.

Keesing's book is plainly intended for students, with its simple prose, large type, lots of big photos and footnotes on who Tylor, Durkheim and Muchona are. Its fifteen chapters trot quickly through various aspects of this Solomon Island ethnography: the spirit world, the forms of magic, the cosmological structures, the powers and precepts of the dead, relations with the ancestors, sacrifice, death and desacralization, the sociology and symbolism of Kwaio religion, its sociology of knowledge and, finally, the culture since contact. It's all well done. The different topics are first placed in their anthropological setting and then swiftly described. Intellectual problems are not skirted, but bluntly faced. Keesing is very careful that his deciphering of Kwaio symbolic codes does not end up advertising his decoding flair rather than Kwaio concerns. To him, single-minded structuralist analysis leads to a sterile 'cultural cryptography'. Such code-cracking must be allied to a sociology of knowledge if it is to be both fertile and representative of local ways. Thanks to his years of fieldwork among the Kwaio, he details this sociology well and then subjects it to a neo-Marxist approach which sketches how Kwaio ideology is perpetuated and who gains what from it.

Throughout, Keesing cautiously teases out what can and cannot be said about Kwaio life. Unconcerned with ultimate explanations and origins, they have an 'open' conceptual system. They accept innovation (within limits Keesing assiduously draws out), can interpret the same type of event differently at different times (see, for example, pp.106-7) and, generally, do not provide elaborate systematised exegesis on their highly developed ritual system: a lack of emphasis that makes Keesing underline the experiential nature of ceremonial. He also shows that pollution is relational, that *mana* is a stative, not a substantive (corroborating my own work on *mana* in Vanuatu), and that *abu* ('forbidden', related to Eastern Oceanic *tapu*) is defined according to context and perspective. Thus the change from *abu* to *mola* ('secular, ordinary') can be glossed for a priest as 'desacralization' and for a woman as 'purification'. Such rewriting of ethnography uncovers past male bias (by fieldworkers) and reveals the powers of women for what

they are. The occasional inclusion of a divergent analysis by another anthropologist (McKinley) of some aspect of Kwaio ritual reinforces this sense of continuing interpretation. Keesing refuses to judge these tantalizing quotes definitively. In sum, in other words, it is not just students who will learn much from this book.

A final note: if this ethnography is for students, why is it so expensive that only affluent Ivy Leaguers can afford it?

In Meigs' book, the Hua men of the Eastern Highlands regard women's interiors as rotting, putrid, dark and heavy matter, the home of a wild, awesome fertility. To them, women are like *pitpit*, a fast-growing, rapidly reproducing vegetable with a soft, wet inside; men are like the black palm tree, slow-growing but strong, relatively infertile. Women have excess *nu* ('animating principle, vital essence', including all bodily substances, especially fluids); males have little *nu* and have difficulty maintaining adequate vitality when adult. Though men insist on the inferiority of women, deny them political voice and seek to impress their superiority symbolically, they imitate menstruation, believe in male pregnancy, and secretly eat foods identified with the *korogo* ('wet, soft, fast-growing, fertile') qualities of women. Women pollute when menstruating, having sex, or giving birth. However, gender is not tied to genitals 'but can flow and change with contact as substances seep in and out of his or her body. Gender is not an immutable state but a dynamic flow' (p.72). Men and women can resolve their categorical differences by reference to the opposition of *korogo* versus *hakeri'a* ('dry, hard, slow-growing, infertile'): the balanced middle is ideal, but women must be extremely *korogo* to reproduce, and men extremely *hakeri'a* to defend themselves and their wives.

Hua food rules are strikingly numerous and, since one's food (including bodily exuviae) is a product of one's *nu*, these dietary rules both symbolize social relationships and express the Hua theory of growth and health. For *nu* is central to the Hua: exchange of food is both prestation and transfer of *nu*. *Nu* connects food, sex and pollution: food and sex are exchanges of physical substances between bodies and 'both are subject to pollution, which is merely the transfer of body substances under negative social conditions' (p.124). In a cosmos without gods or many beliefs about the spirits, *nu* is seen as the source and sustainer of life, the means of saving oneself. Management of *nu* is the point of most ritual. Hua husband their bodies, not their souls. This is their religion.

Meigs' ethnography is notable for its careful dissection of the narrow, highly organised contexts where men are hostile to women, for her well-drawn picture of the links between food, sex and pollution, and for her stimulating discussion on *nu* as *religion*. She says her ethnography is one of the male ideology and that her next task is to examine the extent of Hua women's religious ideas. I look forward to her results with interest.

The Garia is essentially a revised version of Lawrence's doctorate, supervised in the late 'forties by Meyer Fortes, who prefaces the book. In his introduction, Lawrence says he delayed publication for 33 years partly because of administrative and teaching pressures, and partly because of his colleagues' original lack of enthusiasm for his interpretation of Garia ethnography - many doubted his analysis. The advantages of this delay are that the author, thanks to his repeated returns to the Garia, can now give historical depth to his doctoral study, correct past (published) errors, amend earlier biases, and take account of some critics' comments and reply to those of others; both his thesis and his subsequent, scattered papers can now be read in a single, coherent text. The disadvantages are that what once may have seemed revolutionary now appears relatively commonplace (today, Garia social organization can be seen as one extreme along a recognized continuum), and that some of Lawrence's concerns may strike some as not very up to date:

> In view of its nature, it would be at least premature to try to interpret my material in the light of several prominent current anthropological theories - such as French structuralism, symbolism, and neo-Marxism - certainly until it has been ordered and presented in its own right (p.4).

The Garia appeared so exceptional in New Guinea anthropology because they lack territorially based societies. Their cognatic groups cannot function according to classical lineage theory, but are bound to overlap and create divided interests. Lawrence uses 'network analysis', since most settlements are irregular and unstable groupings of people linked either by their present common economic interests in the same geographical area or by their wish to associate with a particular big-man. In fine detail he shows that local organisation is a by-product of the interaction of ego-centred networks of kinship, marriage and descent relationships (which he calls security-circles), the rules of land tenure and the influence of big-men. Security-circles have no corporate identity, since each exists in relation to ego. Their members *nanunanu* ('think on, have concern for') fellow members. They are bound to one another by moral obligations of mutual trust and solidarity. In this world of high mobility, where big-men are more renowned as masters of ritual knowledge than as policy-makers, moral principles ultimately depend 'not on legal and political sanctions but on an individual's sense of responsibility, reinforced by his own self-interest' towards fellow members and the gods and ghosts that make up his superhuman security-circle. 'Religion' is no separable category. The 'human' and the 'superhuman' interlock like the fingers of clasped hands. Both are parts of the same cosmic system - a fine web of relationships between

beings (whether human or superhuman) all of whom exist together in the same natural environment. Both are aspects of the same terrestial reality.

In closing, Lawrence argues that New Guinean government officials and expatriate professionals working in the country can read his book with profit, and that if New Guineans are to become their own masters they must develop their indigenous economy and raise the general level of education - even at the possible expense of the traditional ways of life he has described. The general form of Garia society may have survived because it is so supple, but should it be allowed to continue? This final, explicit political message gives Lawrence's book a value far beyond the purely academic.

Trying to tie the main threads of these books together would produce something as arbitrary as the concept 'Melanesia' itself. And any general review article about the latest editions on the subject tends to say more about present anthropological approaches than about the ethnography of the area. Our original questions remain unanswered though we can, perhaps, now ask them more precisely. We can, for instance, isolate certain common themes, ethnographic signposts to future potentially productive avenues of research: the lissomness of Melanesian social organization, the importance of innovation, the central role of exchange, the indiscrete nature of 'religion' as a category, the prominence of the individual, and the cultural significance of ritually produced emotion - for it is Poole's paper that holds the imagination long after reading. Such intensive, methodologically aware investigation of individual psychology promises much. When is he to publish the rest of his five-volume doctorate about the first stage of the Bimin-Kuskusmin ritual cycle of initiation?

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