

Culture



**William L. RODMAN and Dorothy Ayers COUNTS (eds.),
Middlemen and Brokers in Oceania, ASAO Monograph No. 9,
Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1982. 304 pages, US
\$16.50 (cloth)**

Noel Dyck

Volume 4, Number 2, 1984

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1078275ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1078275ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Canadian Anthropology Society / Société Canadienne d'Anthropologie (CASCA),
formerly/anciennement Canadian Ethnology Society / Société Canadienne
d'Ethnologie

ISSN

0229-009X (print)

2563-710X (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Dyck, N. (1984). Review of [William L. RODMAN and Dorothy Ayers COUNTS (eds.), *Middlemen and Brokers in Oceania*, ASAO Monograph No. 9, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1982. 304 pages, US \$16.50 (cloth)]. *Culture*, 4(2), 73–74. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1078275ar>

Tous droits réservés © Canadian Anthropology Society / Société Canadienne
d'Anthropologie (CASCA), formerly/anciennement Canadian Ethnology Society /
Société Canadienne d'Ethnologie, 1984

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit
(including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be
viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal,
Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to
promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

The stories were apparently initially transcribed in the Tok Pisin dialect spoken fluently by the storytellers. Since Counts intended the book "for use throughout Papua New Guinea", she chose to render the tales in "more standardized forms," for the most part following Mihalic's and Dutton's standard dictionary and grammars (p. 167). Literate Kaliai will probably have little difficulty reading their stories and they certainly should take pride in such a well-produced presentation of their culture. However, the primary intended audience would seem to be other Papua New Guineans. Given this, one of my few criticisms of the work has to do with the fact that some important ethnographic and geographical information included in the English introduction and inserted in the texts of the stories in their English versions is not incorporated in the Tok Pisin portion of the book. This is likely to lessen somewhat the understanding those not literate in English can take away from the tales.

Scholars will likely want a bit more of this contextual information, but they can rely on Counts' continuing publication of first-rate anthropological papers, and they certainly have here a corpus of superb English translations. Counts has "attempted to put the tales into language that is understandable... and to capture some of the drama that makes the stories so entertaining as oral literature" (p. 167). In both of these endeavours, she has succeeded admirably.

William L. RODMAN and Dorothy Ayers COUNTS (eds.), *Middlemen and Brokers in Oceania*, ASAO Monograph No. 9, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1982. 304 pages, US \$16.50 (cloth).

By Noel Dyck
Simon Fraser University

This volume, which examines the dynamics of non-traditional political roles in the Pacific region, constitutes the most recent contribution from scholars working in this region to the anthropological study of political middlemen, entrepreneurs and brokers. Like earlier works on traditional bigmen in Oceania, these essays are characterized by rich ethnographic accounts and a broad set of theoretical concerns. The regional focus of this volume will, of course, make it required reading for Pacific scholars. I suspect, however, that any political anthropologist concerned with processes

of representation, mediation and links between nation-states and local communities—and especially those involved in "fourth world" studies—will appreciate the thoughtful analytical approach and valuable comparative material provided by this collection.

In their introduction, Rodman and Counts trace the recent development within anthropology of the political middleman in his many guises. Noting the great variation of meanings attached to this term, they astutely conclude that middleman studies have become "a conceptual Tower of Babel, a domain in which anthropologists all seem to speak a different language and talk past each other".

To rectify this situation, they suggest that the concepts of "political middleman" and "broker" be separated for purposes of analysis, arguing that since not all brokers perform middleman roles it is misleading to place brokers that operate exclusively in local-level political fields in the same analytical framework with middlemen who act as intermediaries between different but related social systems. Rodman and Counts do, however, contend that appointed or elected middlemen, who use their own initiative to innovate channels of communication between individuals, groups, structures or cultures, should be viewed as brokers. In essence, they urge us to speak of middleman roles and brokerage processes, an eminently sensible suggestion.

Boutilier's essay on district officers in the British Solomon Islands Protectorate provides a well-shaped historical account of this often neglected colonial official who "made empire work". Boutilier focuses upon the way that district officers, like appointed native representatives, inter-related the functions of distinctive socio-political systems, although he notes that as representatives of an external authority, district officers were always able to summon physical sanctions to support them.

Rodman's study of native legal mediators in pre-independence Vanuatu tackles the abiding question of whether middlemen are to be better understood as "bridgers of gaps in communication or as perpetuators of social and cultural fault planes". Through a series of finely drawn case studies, he illustrates how assessors' channelling of disputes to different levels of law permitted them to exercise control over what comprised an integrated legal system. Rodman goes on to show that the adequacy of the bridges built between the local and colonial systems depended at least in part upon the gaps in communication steadfastly maintained by the assessors.

Hughes and Connelly deal with the legitimacy of elected officials as middlemen on the island of Ponape in American Micronesia, but their concern with different types of legitimacy is not particularly well served by the ethnographic data they present.

A second essay which deals with legitimacy, in this case the legitimacy of middlemen in Northwest New Britain, fares much better on this score. Counts' analysis of Kaliai middlemen probes the relationship between the sources and limits of a middleman's power and his ability to act as an agent of modernizing change. She concludes that the goals and context of a middleman's message for change may have an overriding effect on its perceived legitimacy and chances for success.

Perhaps the most compelling essay in the volume is Rutz's account of bureaucracy and brokerage in Fiji. Rutz begins by locating within the overall political economy of Fiji the limits of villagers' opportunities to exploit the material largesse controlled by a burgeoning national bureaucracy. Developing a model of brokerage possibilities from these factors, the author goes on to illustrate the value of such an exercise, presenting a case study which not only corroborates the model but which is informed by it.

Philibert's essay contrasts the careers of two middlemen in an urban village in Vanuatu. In a situation such as this, which the author calls one of "limited encapsulation", a chief is expected to act as a "door", serving to keep the administration's access to the village half-closed/half-open. Toward this end, clients exercise close supervision of their middlemen's activities.

Shankman's study of village mayors in Western Samoa deals perceptively with a theme raised by a number of the other papers in the volume, namely, the political and economic constraints employed by local communities to control the activities of their representatives. Shankman's account underscores the editors' claim that not all middlemen are able to act as brokers, entrepreneurs or innovators.

In a careful analysis of a Manga entrepreneurial middleman in the New Guinea highlands, Pflanz-Cook and Cook maintain that pre-contact bigman-ship was essentially an indigenous style of entrepreneurship. In recounting the unceasing activities of a man whose community was "pacified" by the Australians only in 1956, the authors show the revolutionary impact contact with the outside world has had on the traditional career paradigm for Manga men. The success of this particular middleman has, they argue, been based upon his ability to reconcile new economic opportunities

with the responsibilities of the pre-contact leadership paradigm.

In the final essay, Swartz summarizes some of the salient points arising from the other papers and submits that it is now time for the central metaphor underpinning the study of middlemen, that of the "bridge", to be abandoned. Political anthropologists should shift their attention, says Swartz, from attempting to explain how political structures work to developing a more finely grained image of contact between groups. This is, as he notes, one of the principal achievements of this useful collection of papers.

Shelton DAVIS et Julie HODSON: *Witness to Political Violence in Guatemala*, Boston, Oxfam-America, 1983 (1^e éd. 1982). 54 p.

Par Pierre Beaucauge
Université de Montréal

Depuis 1979, année où la révolution sandiniste a braqué l'attention internationale sur l'Amérique centrale, journalistes, anthropologues, historiens ont produit sur la région une documentation abondante, bien qu'inégale. Le dossier d'Oxfam-America sur la violence politique au Guatemala (le second de leur série *Impact-Audit*) n'a rien d'un texte de vulgarisation de faits déjà publiés, ni d'un énoncé doctrinaire. Il comporte une double originalité: en ce qui touche à ses données de base, d'une part, et quant au thème spécifique, d'autre part.

Les données proviennent essentiellement de réponses à un questionnaire de 27 questions envoyées à 250 coopérants d'O.N.G. et à des missionnaires (américains en grande partie) qui travaillaient et/ou travaillent encore au Guatemala, particulièrement dans les zones indiennes de l'Ouest. Il s'agit à quelques exceptions près, d'« Américains moyens » imprégnés des valeurs fondamentales des États-Unis d'aujourd'hui: libre entreprise, démocratie, hygiène, scolarisation, etc. C'est donc la majorité silencieuse qui parle du Guatemala. Elle brosse un tableau de la terreur qui va beaucoup plus loin que le décompte hebdomadaire ou mensuel des cadavres auquel se livrent les grandes agences d'information et la Maison Blanche pour savoir si la « situation des droits humains » s'améliore « assez rapidement » au Guatemala.

Ce discours au niveau du quotidien fait ressortir deux traits fondamentaux du terrorisme d'État guatémaltèque. En premier lieu, malgré son caractère massif, il demeure sélectif; sa cible principale: