

Culture



William K. CARROLL, Linda CHRISTIANSEN- RUFFMAN, Raymond F. CURRIE, and Deborah HARRISON, (Eds.), *Fragile Truths: 25 Years of Sociology and Anthropology in Canada*, Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1992

Robert Paine

Volume 13, Number 2, 1993

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1083128ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1083128ar>

[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

Paine, R. (1993). Review of [William K. CARROLL, Linda CHRISTIANSEN-RUFFMAN, Raymond F. CURRIE, and Deborah HARRISON, (Eds.), *Fragile Truths: 25 Years of Sociology and Anthropology in Canada*, Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1992]. *Culture*, 13(2), 95–96. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1083128ar>

Tous droits réservés © Canadian Anthropology Society / Société Canadienne d'Anthropologie (CASCA), formerly/anciennement Canadian Ethnology Society / Société Canadienne d'Ethnologie, 1993

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/>

people have endured. His point is that resistance is most clear in the Kwaio tactics and strategies of compartmentalization, rather than in the circumstances of overt confrontations. That is, Kwaio resistance has consisted primarily of a fight to defend an "invisible wall" created around "the ancestral way of life" (p. 205).

Given this analysis, it is somewhat surprising that so much of the narrative throughout the book is in fact concerned with the series of dramatic confrontations articulated purposefully and with such force in the Kwaio discourse — primarily the discourse of men, for the voices of women certainly remain much more muted (p. 19). Nevertheless, Keesing succeeds admirably in what he sets out to do; he has written a sensitive interpretation of the Kwaio struggle for cultural autonomy. In the course of doing so, he has given readers some insight into the kinds of relationships anthropologists can develop with those about whom they write and with whom they carry out research. In this case, the sense of social and personal closeness between researcher and researched is quite compelling. In 1989, Roger Keesing visited the family of his old Kwaio friend and colleague to mourn his death. I have no doubt that his own death in 1993 will have prompted considerable sorrow among the Kwaio, just as it has among those anthropologists who knew him and his work throughout a distinguished career.

William K. CARROLL, Linda CHRISTIANSEN-RUFFMAN, Raymond F. CURRIE, and Deborah HARRISON, (Eds.), *Fragile Truths: 25 Years of Sociology and Anthropology in Canada*, Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1992.

By Robert Paine

Memorial University

In this book of 436 pages, there are, in my estimation, 14 pages of interest to anthropology — certainly, only 14 pages of anthropology. But the balance of 422 pages must be addressed.

One puzzles over the title — why "Fragile Truths"? The truths we'll find here, the editors tell us, are "not fast-frozen and absolute" (p. 1), have "multiple" meanings (p. 7), are "reconstructed" (p. 2): but this is the truth of sociological truth to the

verge of truism. Still, there is a challenging point of view attached: on account of Canada's own "fragile" relationship with the United States, "Canadian social science may be... more able to recognize the fragility of sociological knowledge" (p. 7). However, it is left to a lone contributor (of the 14 pages) to reshape the proposition with sophistication.

As to the sub-title: its claim to be about "25 years of sociology and anthropology in Canada" is more fraudulent than fragile. Of 22 essays, all of 20 are written by sociologists, and all four editors, to boot, are sociologists (whose Introduction totals up the essay total to 23). So much for anthropology's "25 years!" And in 40 pages of References, one has to search hard for the meagre listings from anthropology.

Nor for that matter is the book much of a showing of 25 years of sociology. Its occasion was the 25th anniversary of the CSAA (Canadian Sociology and Anthropology Association). So it is a retrospective on the CSAA and, in other sets of essays, on the sociopolitical conditions affecting the *practitioners* of sociology in Canada — as seen by some of them.

The grossly partial view that emerges from these limitations is recognized in all candour:

[The book] has little to offer from anthropologists and French-Canadian sociologists... These silences largely reflect the composition of CSAA meetings, which are dominated by the anglophone Canadian sociologists... (p. 5).

That being the obstinate truth, why didn't they call their book "25 Years of the CSAA"? The 25 years brought, notably, disenchantment among the Francophone membership leading to their own association and a preferential shift by anthropologists from CSAA to the CESCE now CASCA (a "small but loyal" band remain with the CSAA: Gordon Inglis's essay).

Elsewhere, there is an Inglis article entitled: "A Discourse on Married Life with Sociology: Or, Life Among the Savages" (CSAA Bulletin No. 30 April 1972). *Fragile Truths*, then, is a role reversal of sorts. (Perhaps it's all Inglis's fault what with his long tongue-in-cheek talk of savages!) At any event, in the divorce courts, *Fragile Truths* would be evidence enough to deliver to those anthropologists and sociologists who (regrettably) want it, their decree *nisi* from each other.

This reviewer notwithstanding, readers of *Culture* may still wish to dip into *Fragile Truths* for ac-

counts of e.g. gender and power or the (ir)relevancy of social science research in the making of public policy. And if you do, don't fail to take in those 14 pages: David Howes's anthropologically-minded — and yes, fragile [read: delicate, darling] — inquiry into "what is [possibly] distinctive about the *kinds of relations* that inform the life of the mind in Canada (as distinct from the U.S.)" (p. 159; original emphasis).

Marilyn GATES, *In Default: Peasants, the Debt Crisis, and the Agricultural Challenge in Mexico*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1993, 274 pages.

By Frans J. Schryer
University of Guelph

This is a timely book which provides useful insights into the dynamics of social change in rural Mexico. Professor Gates' case study of the state of Campeche traces the disastrous results of increasing state intervention in peasant agriculture, starting in the early seventies. Her research also focuses on the impact of the new policies introduced under president Salinas during the more recent period of economic restructuring. His government's neoliberal policies have opened up both new problems and new opportunities.

The book consists of seven chapters. An introductory chapter reviews recent literature dealing with the peasantry and its relationship with the Mexican state, and introduces the author and her research. The second chapter presents a more general appraisal of agrarian policy on the national level. This, plus a background chapter on the economic and political history of Campeche, set the backdrop to a more detailed examination of four planned agricultural projects. Each of these projects involved the introduction of credit and new forms of technology — irrigation, chemical inputs, and agricultural machinery — into a region hitherto characterized by slash-and-burn *milpa* cultivation and some extensive cattle production.

The four agricultural projects described differ not only in terms of type and mix of crops and technology, but also in regard to the kind of people involved in them: Mayan people who have been farming in this region for centuries, Mestizo peasants from Northern Mexico who were persuaded to migrate to the tropical rainforests in the south, and

Mennonite settlers of European extraction whose parents set up farms in the northern state of Durango in the 1920s. The four last chapters discuss the effects of state planning on these different types of rural inhabitants, and the subsequent adaptation of peasants to the debt crisis starting in 1982. The author touches on a wide range of issues, ranging from environmental concerns, economic dependency, public policy, social justice and appropriate technology.

In Default provides a balanced account of changing peasant agriculture. Like many contemporary anthropological researchers, she combines national and village-level analysis. Her case study also narrows the gap between the research done by anthropologists, agronomists and public policy specialists. Her work thus complements studies conducted by scholars such as Yvan Breton, Gerardo Otero and Frank Cancian, to mention some others currently looking at contemporary Mexican agriculture and fishing. Like other recent publications, Gates' book reflects the uncertainties associated with Mexican agricultural policies introduced under Salinas. Like the peasants she quotes, Gates is ambivalent about whether or not this program (as part of the broader policy of privatization) is going to result in both increasing economic productivity and long term equitable development. It becomes clear that this new policy, emphasizing decentralization of decision-making and increasing self-reliance, enabled a small number of peasants to break a vicious circle of dependency on the state, marginalization, and paternalism. At the same time, she wonders about the long-term redistributive effects of neoliberal policies.

I concur with most of the analysis, but found gaps and disagree on several points. In my opinion, the author puts too much emphasis on the misguided nature of state planning in the seventies. Some of the projects associated with past policy, especially those initiated under Echeverria — the building of feeder roads with hand-labour, improvement in rural housing, and credit to small coffee producers — did revitalize the rural economy in many regions. Surely such low-tech projects cannot be equated with the wasteful and inefficient mega projects directed by technocrats? Chapter two could say more about how all agrarian programs in Mexico have been the result of internal struggles among rival political groups. A sub-theme in the book which cries out for further elaboration, is intercultural dynamics. The comparative study of neighbouring communities with