

Culture



Dorothy Ayers COUNTS, *The Tales of Laupu: Ol Stori Bilong Laupu*, Boroko, Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies, 1982. 284 pages, K5.00 (paper)

Terence E. Hays

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Leenhardt emphasizes cultural expressivity and change over structure and system, experience over rules or formal laws. Thus, his phenomenology serves as a critique of the Durkheimian paradigm of obligatory social facts on the one hand and as an alternative to the Levi-Straussian model of structuralism on the other. With regard to the former, Leenhardt constructed the Melanesian world out of *personal* rather than *social* facts and did so without psychologizing; Leenhardt's person was in no way an individual but a locus of socio-mythic dualities living in a discontinuous series of socio-mythic times and spaces. And with regard to the latter, Leenhardt's core concept was not the Saussurian-derived *langue* but the esthetic and mythic perceptions embodied in *parole*. "He situates himself *between* structure and event, emphasizing cultural 'speech' rather than 'language', invention and process rather than rules" (178).

In a post-structuralist context, how do we account for the undeserved neglect of Leenhardt's work in current ethnological theory? Clifford suggests that "his work still stands as a shadowy alternative to Levi-Strauss's, a parallel trajectory that could not be completely rejected and had therefore to be forgotten" (181). Perhaps with the aid of Clifford's excellent account of the man and his work, Leenhardt will be accorded his rightful place in current anthropology.

Dorothy Ayers COUNTS, *The Tales of Laupu: Ol Stori Bilong Laupu*, Boroko, Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies, 1982. 284 pages, K5.00 (paper).

By Terence E. Hays
Rhode Island College

The peoples of Melanesia have long captivated westerners with their stunning visual art, but their comparably rich literature has received much less attention, primarily because traditionally it was only transmitted orally. Unlike masks or canoe prows, the physical forms and portability of which make them more immediately apprehendable, myths, legends, and folktales require transcription and informed, sensitive translation before they are available to wider publics for either scholarly analysis or sheer appreciation. Recently, the Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies (IPNGS) has embarked on a publication programme, a fine example of which is this collection of stories of the Kaliai people of West New Britain. The stories are

translated and introduced by Dorothy Ayers Counts, an anthropologist with intimate knowledge of Kaliai culture, derived from extensive field work over more than a decade.

The IPNGS, through such publications, is committed not only to preserving traditional cultural materials but also to making them available to the people of Papua New Guinea. Thus the sixteen stories are not presented here in the Lusi language of the Kaliai, but in Tok Pisin and English. The acknowledgements, introduction, and even photo captions are also provided in both languages. In effect, then, there are two books here, separated conveniently by a portfolio of eleven black and white photographs depicting the storytellers and scenes of Kaliai life.

In a very useful introduction (pp. 1-18 in Tok Pisin, 158-174 in English), Counts provides brief discussions of the standards used by Kaliai in evaluating the performance and content of oral literature, and of some of the cultural themes that recur in the stories. Somewhat more space is given to detailed descriptions of three named categories of Kaliai tales. A *nasinga* is "a true accounting of historical events," such as the one included here detailing the historical movements of one clan's ancestors; "although people may hotly dispute the interpretation placed on events in such a narrative," *nasinga* may be used as evidence in land or other disputes (p. 158). A *pelunga* may also be used thusly, but is what Counts considers "a legend," i.e., "a story that is believed and that is told about a definite (real or fabulous) person, event, or place" with "no direct traceable ties with living persons or current events" (pp. 158-159); four *pelunga* are included in this collection. Finally, a *ninipunga* is "a tale that does not contain historical or legendary truth," but "may in fact be created by a talented raconteur" and told simply for entertainment or for the education and amusement of children (pp. 161-162). Kaliai stories often incorporate songs, as with five of the tales included in the book, with music transcription and analysis by Timothy J. Keenan.

The heart of the book is, of course, the stories themselves, and we may presume that they represent Kaliai oral literature at its best. Laupu, now deceased but immortalized in the book's title as well as in Kaliai memories, was a "renowned raconteur" whose eldest son, Jakob Mua, is now "widely recognized as one of the most knowledgeable and skilled story tellers of the area" (p. 164). Mua contributed eleven of the stories collected here; Benedik Solou, another of Laupu's sons, provided four; and one was recounted by Mua's wife, Maria Sapanga.

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.