

Culture



James CLIFFORD, *Person and Myth: Maurice Leenhardt in the Melanesian World*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1982. 270 pages, US \$28.50 (cloth)

Pamela Peck

Volume 4, numéro 2, 1984

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1078273ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1078273ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

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

ISSN

0229-009X (imprimé)

2563-710X (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Peck, P. (1984). Compte rendu de [James CLIFFORD, *Person and Myth: Maurice Leenhardt in the Melanesian World*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1982. 270 pages, US \$28.50 (cloth)]. *Culture*, 4(2), 71-72.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1078273ar>

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

Ce document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter en ligne.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/>

érudit

Cet article est diffusé et préservé par Érudit.

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche.

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

completely indifferent to local concerns. On his second trip to the Maclay Coast, the scientist learns of a proposed raid of one village upon another in retaliation for deaths thought to be caused by sorcerers. Miklouho-Maclay decides that he must "ban the war" (384). He does this by firmly threatening an unnamed misfortune that will fall upon anyone taking up arms. Such is the power of gods. Miklouho-Maclay's staggering confidence in the midst of an unfamiliar people and devastating attacks of fever is shaken very rarely. It is perhaps revealing that one of these odd moments of disorientation comes about when he finds himself without that most Western of cultural artifacts — his watch stops (188-90).

To sum up: *Travels to New Guinea* is not only an important historical document, it is fun to read. The narrative is often brisk and vivid. This translation of Miklouho-Maclay's diaries and letters will be a welcomed addition to the book-shelves of Melanesia specialists. It will also be of engaging interest to students of the cross-cultural encounter.

James CLIFFORD, *Person and Myth: Maurice Leenhardt in the Melanesian World*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1982. 270 pages, US \$28.50 (cloth).

By Pamela Peck
University of British Columbia

In a biography which is both evocative and analytical, Clifford invites us to know the enigmatic Maurice Leenhardt who was at once missionary, anthropologist, colonial reformer and historian of religion. Some of us, like Clifford himself, no doubt first encountered Leenhardt through his study in religious phenomenology called *Do Kamo: Person and Myth in the Melanesian World*. Others may not have been introduced to him at all since, as Clifford points out, a phenomenological approach has found little support in existing ethnological theories and it is still rare today to look at culture primarily from the point of view of the person as Leenhardt did.

Clifford's text follows Leenhardt's life of "plenitude" (Leenhardt's own terminology for experiential complementarity of differences as opposed to conflicting roles) through his education as a missionary, various trips to the field, mission activities, the meeting and conversations with Levy-Bruhl, writing, university lecturing and family life. And what emerges from this unusual biographical profile is a study of considerable

benefit to the discipline of Anthropology in at least three major areas, any one of which in itself would have made the book entirely worthwhile. While they are interrelated facets of Leenhardt's work, we can nevertheless isolate them for comment as: complementarity of the missionary and anthropologist roles, approach to fieldwork and theoretical stance.

With regard to the first area, Clifford's book has something to say to those who see the roles of missionary and anthropologist as irreconcilable. One has first to understand that Leenhardt was not a missionary-turned-anthropologist. "Ethnography was, from the beginning, an integral part of his mission work; and his anthropology continued to be shaped by the fundamental goals of his evangelism" (3). The essential complementarity was Leenhardt's interest in personal authenticity. And investigating its nonrational basis, he became concerned about how the participatory essence (within which Melanesian authenticity was "lived") could survive the conditions dictated by European colonial expansion. His was not a program of religious conversion; in fact, Leenhardt questioned conversion and concentrated on the dilemma of the Melanesian "personage" (not yet a person and opposed to individual) who, without concrete participatory supports, was adrift, alienated and deprived of *communitas*. Rather than imagining a people yearning for the Gospels, he said, it is better simply to see "various tribes looking for a support" (76). Missionary activity, then, centered on safeguarding (but not preserving) the traditional culture in order that the process of acculturation would not entail the sacrifice of one's personhood without the opportunity for a renewed authenticity. Indeed, Leenhardt's missionary activity was a peculiar brand of "applied anthropology"!

The above central goal directioned Leenhardt's approach to fieldwork. For in order to investigate personal authenticity, the subject must be understood "from within". This undertaking demanded a reciprocity in ethnological interpretation and Leenhardt brought to the exercise his unique hermeneutical style and experience. Fieldwork was to be seen not as a process of description or interpretation of a bounded other world but rather as an interpersonal, cross-cultural encounter that *produces* descriptive-interpretive texts. The initial authorship is plural; only eventually are data transformed into descriptions and interpretations which can be identified as the work of a single writer.

And finally, what is the value of Leenhardt's phenomenological stance as a theoretical model?

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.