

BOOK REVIEWS

BEN FINNEY, *Voyage of Rediscovery: A Cultural Odyssey through Polynesia*, Berkeley, etc.: University of California Press 1994. xviii, 400 pp., Figures, Appendixes, Bibliography, Index. \$30.00.

The polemical object of this book is Andrew Sharp's claim that Polynesians were technically incapable of purposeful voyaging beyond three hundred miles of open sea and that they had therefore populated Oceania through accidental landings by drifting boats. Computer studies have been made to test the plausibility of Sharp's drift hypothesis, but other means were also needed. By the 1960s Polynesian voyaging canoes had disappeared and their navigation practices were largely forgotten. Finney and others decided to reconstruct their canoes and means of navigation. They first built a double-hulled Hawaiian sailing canoe in the 1960s, which they tested in Santa Barbara and Hawaii for its ability to sail against the wind. Having successfully completed those tests Finney eventually moved to the University of Hawaii, where he found new companions, with whom he formed the Polynesian Voyaging Society. Finney and others in the society set about designing and constructing a larger double-hulled canoe intended for open-sea sailing. The resulting design was a compromise between speculative reconstruction and the need to use modern materials. In 1976, a mixed crew sailed this boat from Hawaii to Tahiti. Since no traditional Polynesian navigators were available, they invited Mau Piailug, a master from Satawal in the Caroline Islands, to guide the boat without the use of modern instruments over the crossing of more than 2,200 nautical miles of open sea. The voyage involved making up the five hundred miles by which Tahiti lies farther to the east than Hawaii against prevailing winds. Despite the fact that he was sailing in foreign seas and under part unfamiliar southern skies, on the thirtieth day Piailug accurately predicted imminent landfall in the Tuamotus. As he returned to Satawal from Tahiti, the crew made the return voyage using modern instruments. Favourable winds meant that this trip lasted only twenty-two days.

Subsequently a young Hawaiian, Nainoa Thompson, trained himself in traditional navigation techniques and in 1980 guided the canoe to Tahiti and back, without any external confirmation of position during the voyage. Using satellite tracking for comparison with Thompson's continuously up-dated dead reckoning of position, the team was able to compile evidence concerning the cause and effects of any errors. For the first time in centuries, a Polynesian navigator had guided a canoe between Hawaii and Tahiti and back, which also constituted a widely appreciated act of cultural revival. Hawaiians kept the canoe sailing in local waters as a floating classroom for teaching schoolchildren and others about the boat and its technology. Then in 1985 the vessel

set out on a 12,000 nautical mile voyage of two years' duration which was to take it to Tahiti, Rarotonga and New Zealand and back, via Samoa.

Finney and his co-authors have written this book in an uncontentious and easily accessible style, judiciously distinguishing what has been proven by these voyages from what has not. They give very useful discussions of the historical, archaeological and anthropological issues relevant to the developing debates about Polynesian navigation and settlement, as well as quite compelling accounts of the voyages and the reactions to them by the inhabitants of the islands. Although a rather different book, this account of experimental voyaging in the Pacific is a worthy companion volume to Thomas Gladwin's *East is a Big Bird* and David Lewis's *We the Navigators*, which explored traditional navigational techniques in Micronesia and prepared the way for the projects described here. What is most encouraging is that the authors have demonstrated that there are practical ways of exploring sailing skills for which there are no longer living witnesses. They and the sailors who sailed the canoe have greatly increased the probability that long-distance intentional voyaging by ancient Polynesians will be accepted as fact in modern scholarship.

R. H. BARNES

LIONEL CAPLAN, *Warrior Gentlemen: 'Gurkhas' in the Western Imagination*, Providence and Oxford: Berghahn 1995. ix, 181pp, Index, References. £26.00.

The quotation marks in the subtitle of the book are important to note: this book is about the constructed category of the 'Gurkhas' as represented in military and regimental histories, Anglo-Indian fiction, and in contemporary British imagination. Caplan tells us in his Introduction that the 'military writings, which are authored principally by British officers who have served with Gurkhas, may be said to constitute a particular mode of "orientalist" discourse, in as much as they pass as an authoritative and superior body of knowledge about "others" which these others can or do not possess about themselves, and also in the sense that they essentialize these others through generalization about their inherent natures' (p. 1). Caplan clearly shares Said and Clifford's 'disaffection with the tendency to conflate and thus essentialize European representations of non-European others [and this] underlies the present essay' (p. 2). But while Caplan points out that the subjects of his book are constituted in the very process of writing about them and can thus be understood best as a fiction, he does not subscribe to the view that nothing exists outside the text. Caplan does not take the 'the literary turn in anthropology' but 'attends to the textual strategies and devices employed by military writers, while constantly referring them to the politico-military settings in relation to which they are produced and reproduced, and in the contexts of which their meanings become more readily understood' (p. 10).

In Chapter 1, the author provides the background to the problem with an account of the nature of the encounter between Nepal and imperial Britain and the dynamics of the Anglo-Nepalese War of 1814 to 1816 during which the British first 'discovered' the Gurkhas. Although Nepal lost the war, the British discovered the fighting qualities of the Nepalese army. The British gained large tracts of hill districts as a result of a treaty signed after the war and gradually recruited Nepalis into the Indian army, organising them along regimental lines. This process lasted over several decades, during which time the category of 'Gurkha' slowly came into being. Unfortunately, Caplan does not tell us explicitly what this term connotes till quite late in the book. The Gurkhas were praised as a quintessentially martial race, with qualities of bravery and stealth in jungle warfare, who made playful and cheerful soldiers, and were loyal if a bit simple-minded.

Chapter 2 deals with the 'ecology of military service', i.e. the socio-economic conditions which forced a section of the Nepali population to seek their livelihood outside the country because of the internal pressure of land and increased impoverishment. This is a fruitful and interesting discussion which points to the real reasons why Gurkhas join the army, rather than remain with an innate martiality. Caplan also discusses the growth of the remittance economy in native villages as a result of the soldiers' earnings and the altered power balances they create.

Chapter 3 is a detailed discussion of the background of the officers who led the Gurkhas and of the socio-cultural profile of the Victorian elite which joined the East India Company's army. This leads on to the central chapter of the book, which is about representing the Gurkhas. It is a striking feature about the discourse on the Gurkhas that it is produced almost exclusively by the British officers who commanded them. Based on regimental histories and interviews with retired officers, Caplan provides a picture of the distinctive identity of Gurkha regiments and their rituals and customs. The overwhelming feature of all literary representations of the Gurkhas is the high degree of essentialism, Nepalis being contrasted with the 'effeminate races of the South', masculine hillmen with feminine plainsmen, the terse, energetic language of the Gurkhas, free-spirited yeomans as opposed to humble, cringing low castes. Caplan points out that this sort of discourse is in keeping with Victorian racial theories, despite the analytical problem of applying a single term 'Gurkhas' to the peoples of the middle hills of Nepal. 'The area was settled by ethnically and linguistically diverse populations, occupying different locations in a national caste hierarchy, and distinguished internally in terms of numerous economic and cultural criteria. On the whole, most military authors disregarded this heterogeneity in their assumptions about the uniformity of Gurkha customs and traditions, and of course in their stereotypes of Gurkha character traits. Most significantly, differences were rendered insignificant by the premise of a common 'biology' which transmitted the collective martial inheritance' (pp. 119–20).

An important additional reason behind this stereotyping was the Indian mutiny of 1857. As the Bengal Army had mutinied and the Gurkhas and Sikhs had remained 'loyal', it was no coincidence that the former were labelled weak-spirited in contrast to

the martial races of the Gurkhas and the Sikhs. This is an aspect of the discussion which Caplan could have made more of. By providing a comparative framework with the other 'martial races' of India, principally the Sikhs and the Pathans (who are only mentioned in passing), the study could have revealed much more of the historical-colonial context that Caplan intends to provide. Clearly at one level the Gurkhas are like the other martial races, but at the same time they occupy a unique place in the British imagination. Caplan's book tells us more about the latter than the former.

Chapter 5 has a rare discussion of the notion of 'courage' in general and among the Gurkhas in particular. Caplan draws on Western philosophical definitions to delineate existing notions of courage in the Western imagination and by extension among the British officers. He then tries to explicate local notions of courage among the Gurkhas themselves, particularly in light of the fact that they do not valorize honour and violent action (unlike the Pathans and Middle Eastern societies, for instance) in their cultural repertoire. The result of this discussion is an interesting conclusion: bravery among the Gurkhas is recognised as a virtue only when rewarded by British honours.

The most interesting contribution which Caplan makes to the discussion is to see the Gurkhas as a mirror image of the Victorian schoolboy. Qualities of 'humour, good breeding, honesty, sportsmanship, courtesy and relaxed attitude to religious practice, taken together added up to the portrait of the Gurkha soldier as young gentleman' (p. 147). The Gurkhas were warriors as well as gentlemen, and it is this combination that makes them unique in the military history of British India.

Caplan certainly achieves his desired objective: 'through situating the depictions of these soldiers by their officer-chroniclers in the complex, changing historical and politico-military conditions of military India, semi-colonial Nepal, and post-imperial Britain...our understanding of the Gurkha Project is enhanced' (p. 158). Warrior gentlemen will be of interest to scholars of colonial and post-colonial institutions, gender and constructions of masculinities, ethnographers of Nepal and South Asia and to historians of the Raj. But its approachable length and style makes it interesting reading for all.

MUKULIKA BANERJEE

RASMUSSEN, SUSAN J., *Spirit Possession and Personhood among the Kel Ewey Tuareg*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1995. xii, 179pp., Index, References. £35.00 (\$49.95).

Spirit Possession and Personhood among the Kel Ewey Tuareg is a welcome and vital contribution to the anthropological study of possession, also revealing the necessity of an in-depth knowledge and appreciation of ethnographic detail and the impor-

tance of focused and detailed fieldwork. The analysis begins with the complete description of one particular woman's experience of spirit possession and a discussion of her biography and local interpretations. Throughout the analysis which follows, case histories are quoted to illustrate particular arguments. While Rasmussen's writing style can be rather laboured and dense, perseverance is rewarded by an insightful discussion of possession, which is in turn used to illuminate social and cultural processes among the Tuareg of Niger. Spirit possession has long been a popular topic in the anthropology of religion, and with this publication, it gets a much-needed reappraisal and update. Rasmussen places her work firmly amongst that which is currently re-thinking traditional anthropological approaches to possession. In doing so she has provided a logical framework for the examination of possession from within a particular culture.

The Tuareg are a nomadic people of North and Sahelian Africa whose society is hierarchically stratified and who used to be slave-owners. Women traditionally held considerable power, even to the extent of choosing the paramount chiefs. Increasing sedentarization, especially since the droughts of the 1980s and the restructuring of the traditional nomadic/slave-owning economy, has resulted in increased pressure on the status of women. This pressure is further compounded by Islamic practices concerning inheritance and power which conflict with traditionally more equitable ones. Tuareg society can thus be seen in terms of a series of conflicts: between nobles, blacksmiths, and former slaves; between men and women; between Muslim and non-Muslim practices; and finally between age groups. In her book, Rasmussen undertakes a detailed analysis of spirit possession from the point of view of the aesthetics, style, imagery and local discourse surrounding the ritual, which leads her to argue that possession 'metaphorically encapsulates the ironies and contradictions of being a Tuareg' (p. 7).

Following an excellent introduction, in which Rasmussen clearly outlines her aim to 'explore how far possession imagery connotes docile endurance and how far it generates critical social commentary' (p. 2), initial discussion of spirit possession ritual or *Tande n Goumaten* is approached through a case-study of the possession of one particular woman. Spirit possession afflicts women almost exclusively and can be inherited through the female line. It is described as a feeling of isolation, as being 'in the wilderness', and denotes feelings of desolation and depression, expressed through physical symptoms such as muteness. It is treated by a *Tande n Goumaten* ceremony, which involves a revealing discourse between the patient, singers, the player of the *Tande* drum and the audience. The patient begins the ritual while lying prone under a blanket. She then rises to her knees, dressed in the indigo veil, traditionally associated with men, and holding a man's sword. She dances the 'head dance', a delicate and graceful swaying of the head, then the neck and finally the whole upper body. The imagery of the swaying branches of a tree is a potent symbol in Tuareg aesthetics. Throughout, the singers and drumming combine with comments from the audience of a joking nature to bring about the final collapse of the patient from exhaustion as the spirits who were dancing leave her body.

Both male attire and bridal imagery alluding to inverted and liminal states are used as significant images during the ceremony. Possession does not afflict every woman and frequently occurs either just before or after marriage, or later, when a woman's daughters are getting married. It is then that many women who were acclaimed singers and musicians find themselves socially restrained from those very activities which brought them attention and satisfaction, at which point they become the patient. 'There is a common thread throughout the various local explanations: the secret repressed sentiments underlying the public cure' (p. 87). Marriage and illicit love are seen as involving the repression of true feelings and as thus providing the potential for possession to occur. Rasmussen dissects the ceremony in all its aspects and examines every possible trigger of social tension which can lead to possession. The whole concept of Tuareg aesthetics and its importance in interpreting the culture is related to traditional knowledge and power systems. Possession as approached through the conflicts in Tuareg society 'may be interpreted as a struggle for the control of Tuareg identity at both symbolic and political levels' (p. 91).

Brief but imperative explanations of Tuareg cosmology, society, class structure, composition and social mobility are left till near the end, along with details of kinship roles and relationships. The salient points being related to the Tuareg attempt to maintain traditional class distinctions despite the freeing of slaves and changing economic circumstances, which are increasing social mobility and blurring traditional relationships. The prosperous are no longer necessarily the nobles. Possession songs are given a thorough inspection, their melodies and rhythms being evaluated as well as their words.

This book should take its place on any reading list dealing with the topics of religion, cosmology and possession, both for its useful methodological approach and for placing its discussion of possession squarely within the cultural aesthetics and wider issues facing Tuareg society, by which it is bound.

MARIE-CLAIRE BAKKER

DANIEL DE COPPET (ed.), *Understanding Rituals*, London and New York: Routledge (EASA Series) 1992. viii, 116 pp., Indexes. £9.99.

The six papers in this volume all derive from a panel held at the first EASA conference in Coimbra in 1990. The editor, Daniel de Coppet, is perhaps most deserving of recognition for having led the way in applying the ideas of Louis Dumont on hierarchical opposition and value to the analysis of ritual. De Coppet himself, who provides only the Introduction, refers to these ideas in the context of his own suggestion that the distinction between the ritual and non-ritual 'constitutes the social dimension par excellence' and as such forms 'the necessary and sufficient condition for the comparison

of societies—that is, for the practice of anthropology itself' (p. 2). While what constitutes the non-ritual as well as the ritual varies cross-culturally and is thus socially determined, to adopt any other position would be Eurocentric—for the distinction itself is universal. Moreover, ritual is important in demonstrating a society's values, in the sense intended by Dumont.

This does not prove to be a prescription for the whole book. The one paper that actually proceeds in this fashion, and then the ideas involved are left implicit, is Jos Platenkamp's complex analysis of Tobelo ritual, in which ritual is seen as circulating objects, persons and values through the society. Two papers closely related to each other, by Charles Malamoud on Vedic and Brahmanic India and by Raymond Jamous on a Muslim group of north India, highlight the significance of cross-sex sibling links in ritual and exchange ideology and their persistence even after their respective marriages have physically separated brother and sister. Michael Cartry examines cross-references between different Gurmanceba (Burkina Faso) rituals in what is the most autobiographical paper of the collection. David Parkin not only reverses Lévi-Strauss's privileging of myth over ritual, he also sees ritual action as always performative, unlike words, despite their frequent importance in ritual. *Pace* Austin, it is less that words are performative than that certain stages in the rite become, or are made, appropriate for them. He also links the practice of bodily mutilations and divisions to a notion of agency which replaces Western individual self-determination with social control through ritual.

All these approaches see ritual as doing things, in a manner derivable, *inter alia*, from Durkheim and van Gennep. The remaining paper, while not denying this, challenges head-on the Durkheimian assumption of closed societies confirming their existence through the conformity-inducing seduction of ritual. Gerd Baumann uses his fieldwork experiences in a multi-ethnic suburb of London to show that rituals readily incorporate outsiders, who can range from the casual bystander to members of a different ethnic or religious group, and that they can also put forward demands for change as well as encourage conformity. Instead of the Durkheimian ritual community, we should be talking about the ritual 'constituency', or rather a number of such constituencies, each with a separate interest in the same rite. Baumann falls short of rejecting Durkheim's approach entirely, but he puts the burden of proof on the latter's supporters in this instance. Perhaps the suggestion may be regarded as supplementing rather than replacing conformity-based approaches. This is the most thought-provoking paper of a thought-provoking collection.

ROBERT PARKIN

CURTIS M. HINSLEY, *The Smithsonian and the American Indian: Making a Moral Anthropology in Victorian America*, Washington, DC, and London: Smithsonian Institution Press 1994. 319 pp., Photographs, Figures, Bibliography, Index. £13.95.

This is a paperback reissue of Hinsley's *Savages and Scientists: The Smithsonian Institution and the Development of American Anthropology, 1846–1910* (1981), its title now politically corrected. The original subtitle gives a better picture of the book's subject. Hinsley starts with the founding of the Smithsonian in 1840, resulting from James Smithson's bequest of \$515,000 to the United States for the establishment of an institution 'for the increase and diffusion of knowledge among men' and from the four-year voyage of the United States Exploring Expedition under Charles Wilkes beginning in 1838.

From its founding the Smithsonian became involved in controversy surrounding the proper care of the collections brought back from that expedition. These controversies in turn involved differing perspectives over whether the Institution should be devoted to the democratic display of national greatness, largely through the work of amateurs, or whether it should be concerned with careful scientific study of its collections. As Hinsley remarks, 'Through much of the nineteenth century, the number of men who shared serious scientific aspirations exceeded the capacity of the society to provide opportunities for full time pursuit of those interests.' The institutional structures for professional science, and for anthropology, developed rather late, and the Smithsonian played an important, if rather chequered, role in it.

In 1846 Henry Rowe Schoolcraft agitated Lewis Henry Morgan and others into taking an interest in the anthropology of American Indians and sent a proposal to the Smithsonian for an investigation of American ethnology. The publication in 1848 of the first volume of the *Smithsonian Contributions to Knowledge*, devoted to Ancient Monuments of the Mississippi Valley by Ephraim George Squire and Edwin H. Davis, initiated its support for scholarly work on American archaeology. The finished version of the book bore the heavy stamp of the Smithsonian secretary Joseph Henry, who edited out what he deemed unfounded speculation. Following the Civil War the Smithsonian's involvement with anthropology was significantly increased with the foundation of the Bureau of American Ethnology at the instigation of its first director, the one-armed leader of the first two expeditions through the Grand Canyon, Major John Wesley Powell, friend and follower of Lewis Henry Morgan. Its Annual Reports and Bulletins made public the valuable linguistic and ethnographic work of its contributors, who had no formal training in these subjects and were subsequently criticized for their inevitable amateurism by the Boasians.

The members of the Bureau became attached by a variety of means, some simply by showing up and being persistent. Many were torn between the desire to spend their time in the field doing research and the requirement to satisfy political bosses by work on the episodic and long-drawn-out project which eventually became the *Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico*. There was continuing tension between demands that they produce surveys of use to the public and its representatives in Congress, and

their individual interests in scholarship. Powell made the case for government-supported anthropology but paid the price of seeing that support exposed to the whim of political fashion. When asked to sign a petition calling for an investigation into the responsibility of the army and the Bureau of Indian Affairs for the Wounded Knee massacre, both Powell and Otis Mason refused. Mason allegedly said, 'We never express ourselves vehemently upon political matters. It isn't healthy to do so.' Powell refused because it would embroil him in controversy with the Secretary of the Interior. Powell, in fact, was then under attack from critics of the Geological Survey, from which he was soon forced to resign. In his declining years, he also ceded power and budget to the director of the Smithsonian.

Following his death in 1902, his lieutenant and chosen successor, the hapless William John McGee, was forced from the Bureau after an humiliating investigation by Smithsonian officials into the management of the Bureau under Powell and himself. Among other charges, their report accused them of careless and possibly corrupt purchases of manuscripts from Alice Fletcher and Franz Boas, who for a period kept himself afloat by selling linguistic manuscripts and notebooks to the Bureau for a total of \$4,000. Powell was replaced by a reluctant and exhausted William Henry Holmes, who served from 1902 to 1910.

Members of the Bureau struggled to create professional standards where there had been none, and many of their achievements were remarkable. They were caught between demands from politicians and Smithsonian officials to produce practical results and their own desire to pursue open-ended research. Hinsley gives useful sketches of the various, sometimes colourful, sometimes dry and dusty characters involved, and he attempts to relate his description of their activities to the changing scholarly and social issues and circumstances of their day. I have already found his section on J. Owen Dorsey useful in my own work, and the book's reissue is welcome. It provides the best ready account of an important aspect of the history of anthropology.

R. H. BARNES

MARCUS BANKS, *Ethnicity: Anthropological Constructions*, London: Routledge, 1996. viii, 210 pp., Bibliography, Index.

It is not uncommon, as an anthropology undergraduate, to feel that your chosen subject bears little resemblance to everyday life, particularly when a word which you thought meant something to you (e.g. 'kinship', 'gender', 'ethnicity') is abstracted beyond all recognition by different authors in apparently conflicting ways. Partly for this reason, Marcus Banks's *Ethnicity: Anthropological Constructions* should become an important book for students, since, as the title suggests, a genuine attempt is made to step outside the academic field in order to assess the contribution of sociological

and anthropological discourse on 'ethnicity' to the treatment of social differentiation in British and American society at large. By quoting his own, ambivalent conclusion near the start of the book, however, the author makes it clear that the reader is to expect neither a 'once-and-for-all' answer, nor, necessarily, an end to disillusionment on the subject of 'ethnicity'. Instead, we are promised 'a book about reading, a book for consulting, a starting place before going on to read the original sources and, for the potential fieldworker, before going on to try to find ethnicity in the field' (p. 9).

In an unpatronizing tone which characterizes the entire book, Banks introduces his subject by pointing out that the web of meanings which has grown up around the term 'ethnicity' over the last thirty years is simply too large and complex for the undergraduate to unravel merely through reading primary sources: a guide is needed. Chapter 2 identifies three distinct schools of thought on the subject of 'ethnicity' with great clarity, and should become a standard reference for both teachers and students of the topic. It also sets up a dichotomy between 'primordialist' and 'instrumentalist' views on ethnicity, the juxtaposition of which forms the analytical core of the book. This provided a useful paradigm for approaching the vast literature covered by the volume, although the association of particular authors, texts and opinions with one theoretical stance or the other seemed constraining at times. Aside from these key terms, however, jargon is largely forsaken, as is the positive tone of many other texts which mislead students into seeking chains of continuity between different authors where few in fact exist; 'the wheel', as Banks (p. 2) puts it, 'has been invented several times over'.

In Chapters 3 and 4, which deal with the topics of race and ethnicity in the USA and Britain, the author touches open-mindedly upon the work of political scientists, sociologists and social psychologists, with which I was largely unfamiliar. The comparison of American and British writing on the subject was therefore useful as an introduction and, in itself, as an illustration of the need to account for academic theories as products (rather than mere descriptions) of the different social situations which they address, as well as of the disciplinary conventions they represent. A view of ethnicity as an academic construct rather than necessarily a social or psychological fact pervades the structure of the book, posing an important warning for prospective fieldworkers.

Chapter 5 ('Ethnicity and nationalism') again provides a crystal-clear summary of the main relevant theories, which will be invaluable to students either as a prelude or a supplement to primary reading. While the important question 'Do majorities have ethnicity?' is addressed, however, the problem of powerful minorities is largely neglected. By omitting the boundary mechanisms of social élites from his discussion of the relationship between ethnic groups, nationalism and the state, I felt that the author missed an opportunity to sharpen his account of the tacit association of 'ethnicity' with weak minority groups or 'groups demanding something from the state' in much anthropological literature.

Whether we like it or not, ethnicity is, as Banks puts it, 'out there' as a feature of both academic and non-academic discourse, and in the penultimate chapter a critical understanding of ethnicity and nationalism, developed through a broad survey of the

academic literature, is brought to bear upon two highly revealing treatments of social divisiveness by the British media and public. What this seems to reveal is that while anthropological constructions of ethnicity have failed to provide a coherent tool for cross-cultural sociological analysis, they have indirectly lent a veneer of legitimacy to the popular resurrection of a narrow-minded primordialism which obfuscates more than it reveals about social change and conflict, and itself contributes to the erection of social boundaries.

With this in mind, Banks's conclusion could have made more of studies (e.g. by Gluckman) which have succeeded in describing and accounting for social differentiation with no recourse to an abstract autonomous theory of ethnicity, in order to make a strong case for the abandonment of the concept in anthropological discourse. However, having pointed out that ethnicity's coffin is riddled with nails, the author refrains from consigning it to the ground. As promised, this is not 'a book for reading', but a 'book about reading', long on debate and short on ethnographic detail, a balance which Banks modestly characterises as 'all bread and no jam' (p. 8). The combination of breadth with clarity (the book is only 210 pages in length), lack of dogma and extensive references means that plentiful jam is assured, at least, for newcomers to the subject.

DAVID WENGROW

PETER RIVIÈRE, *Absent-minded Imperialism: Britain and the Expansion of Empire in Nineteenth-century Brazil*, London and New York: Tauris Academic Studies 1995. 194 pp., Illustrations, Map, Bibliography, Index. £39.50.

The author, renowned for research and numerous publications on the social anthropology of the Guiana Indians, has in this, his most recent work, turned historian. Using data from church, government and missionary society archives, Brazilian and British, he investigates the 'Pirara incident', a dramatic, colourful event in nineteenth-century British Guiana diplomatic history.

In 1838 the Revd Thomas Youd founded an Anglican mission in the Makushi Indian village of Pirara in the hinterland of British Guiana (now Guyana). He intended it to be the salvation of the Rupununi Indians, but instead provoked an active phase in the Anglo-Brazilian dispute over the position of the frontier between the Essequibo River and the Rio Branco. The Brazilians from Fort São Joaquim on the Rio Branco occupied Pirara, causing Youd to withdraw, and during the ensuing international incident the British Government dispatched a military force to retake it. The journey up the Essequibo took a month, and after an occupation of six-and-a-half months the British withdrew. The incident ended with the Agreement of 1842, whereby Britain and

Brazil neutralized the disputed territory until the line of frontier was settled. In 1904 the Rupununi District, including Pirara, was recognized as British.

This study is a micro-history, with a blow-by-blow account of events and a skilful coordination of circumstances and personalities: the two military protagonists who were at Pirara, and the unfortunate Protestant missionary who, while wishing to reinstate his mission, found himself hosting his opposite number, the Carmelite Friar José dos Santos Innocentes. A British Boundary Commission headed by Robert Schomburgk was also present. These dramatic encounters took place before an anxious Makushi audience and involved elaborately courteous exchanges of visits, flamboyant display and hospitality. Meanwhile, communication difficulties and long delays in receiving information from their distant outposts beset both governments. There is an Appendix with a useful chronology of major events. Reproductions of paintings by Edward Goodall, the artist accompanying Schomburgk, depict Pirara and its course.

A history in depth, with a short time-scale, allows for a close examination of individuals, institutions and their motivations, and one of the author's most interesting discoveries is the role of individuals in the Pirara incident. Schomburgk's correspondence with the Royal Geographical Society revealed that the Brazilian Commandant at Fort São Joaquim had owned an Indian house in Pirara, in which he frequently stayed and from which he traded. An investigation into Thomas Youd's foundation at Pirara showed that neither the government nor the Church Missionary Society had authorized it. His visits to the Rupununi were meant to be exploratory only. It was the conjunction of these two circumstances in a touchy area of Anglo-Brazilian relations which acted as a catalyst in escalating a full-blown boundary dispute.

Rivière finds the motivations of the British Government to be more obscure. He notes a lack of interest in a commercial future in the Rupununi and also a lack of reference to territorial expansion and sovereignty. There was dismay at the costs which the military occupation of Pirara had incurred. He concludes that territorial gain was a secondary consideration for Britain, a means to an end only, and concern about sovereignty over Pirara was expressed 'less in terms of disputed territory and more as a worry over the protection of British citizens who, it was feared, would be enslaved if Brazilians were left in control of the territory' (p. 170). Having abolished slavery, the British were pressurizing Brazil to follow suit. Both Schomburgk and Youd reported a forcible recruitment of labour by Brazilians entering the Rupununi, and this had aroused considerable feeling. Humanitarian and anti-slavery considerations were certainly part of the motivations in the Pirara incident but there was also Christianity and the driving ideology of the evangelical movement. British missionaries travelled to remote areas to propagate the Christian gospel and bring spiritual salvation and civilization to pagans. They carried their culture and the imperial flag with them. It is indicative that when Sir Henry Light, the governor of British Guiana, recruited the reluctant Youd to accompany the military to Pirara, he trusted that 'Pirara would flourish again and become, under her Majesty's protection, "a focus of Christian light to the aborigines"' (p. 88). A President of Para saw this motivation too and had re-

marked that the British, having abolished negro slavery, were now showing themselves attentive to the salvation of souls, 'occupying territory in order to save the souls of the inhabitants' (p. 177). This powerful promotion of Christian and Victorian ideals might be compared with the promulgation of democratic institutions and human rights by the West, which similarly pervades international relations today.

I am not convinced that the Pirara incident should be labelled a case of 'absent-minded imperialism' as the book's title states and as is discussed at the end of the text. Even the attribution of 'a certain lack of attention' is perhaps unjustified, given the state of knowledge of the hinterland and its Amerindians at the time. To reach the interior Amerindians from the colonial settlements of the coast entailed long and dangerous river journeys. A systematic exploration and mapping by Robert Schomburgk, begun in 1835, was still proceeding. At Pirara in 1838 Youd had placed himself well beyond the sphere of regular British communications and administration.

Rivière notes that the 1842 Agreement (the text of which I would like to have seen reproduced) excluded a political and military presence from the disputed territory, but not a religious one. He remarks: 'It remains a mystery that Brazil as much as Britain failed to take advantage of this clause in the agreement. It is of course possible, even likely, that neither country's heart was much in the affair' (p. 136). In fact, a longer historical perspective shows that the Anglican Church retained an undiminished enthusiasm for a Rupununi mission. During the second half of the nineteenth century a series of itinerant clergy visited and toured Makushi villages, conducted church services, taught and delivered the sacraments. A permanent mission was established at Yupukari in 1908, but not before Makushi leaders had several times built a church and missionary residence in anticipation of the arrival of a priest which the Church promised but could not deliver. Uncertainty over the political status of the Rupununi was one factor, but more crucial were problems of communication and logistics and a lack of Church resources and personnel. In the Potaro valley, in the 1870s and 1880s, other untenable missions were established, and failed for similar reasons.

A significant outcome of the Pirara incident and subsequent agreement was that the Makushi were left to live their customary, independent life for over half a century. Competition for their allegiance protected them from forcible labour recruitment and gave them government-sponsored Captains and presents! They played host to touring missionaries and a variety of exploratory and scientific expeditions, and they themselves travelled down-river to work in the timber concessions and visit colonial settlements to barter their goods and services. Attending mission churches and chapels, they absorbed Christian knowledge, took it back home, and adapted it to their own beliefs. This led to a variety of enthusiastic movements, reported in contemporary literature from 1845 on and culminating in the formation of today's Hallelujah religion. Significantly, this was founded by a Makushi who accompanied two clergymen to the lower Demerara in the late 1860s or early 1870s.

There is no systematic treatment of the Makushi in this work, but much interesting and useful information on them may be gained from it. Notably, we can appreciate how the Pirara incident foreshadows the subsequent division of Makushi lands and

their loss of independence. Recognized as the rightful owners of the soil, their lands having been in possession of their ancestors down the ages, they were even denoted a sovereign nation. However, it is also clear that neither Britain nor Brazil thought that this would remain the case. The governor of British Guiana reiterated that the territory belonged to the Indians who 'glad of British protection would yield to its power'. He also remarked that the territory claimed might be useful to Great Britain (p. 145). This is one more example of circumstances in which indigenous peoples and their territories have become absorbed by powerful nation-states not through military conquest but through a gradual domination accompanied by various inducements and justified by moral imperatives. The British thought that Indian welfare could only be ensured if they were to come under British protection and become British citizens. The price paid was loss of independence and much of the indigenous culture, the colonization of ancestral lands and the annexation of its resources.

This book, which puts the years of the Pirara incident on the historical map, is a valuable contribution to the history of the Guiana hinterland and to an understanding of the urge to imperial expansion there. It is also a very useful and interesting study for students of the Rupununi Indians, since the events described show the beginning of a series of social and cultural processes that are still unfolding. It makes excellent reading.

AUDREY COLSON

JOAN MARK, *The King of the World in the Land of the Pygmies*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press 1995. xvi, 276 pp., Index, Map, Illustrations. £28.50.

This is the story of an American who went to Africa, fell in love and never mentally returned home. A Boston Brahman, Patrick Lowell Putnam (1904–1953) attended classes in anthropology at Harvard and participated in its expeditions to Africa. That determined his lifecourse. Shortly afterwards, he went back to the edge of the Zairean rainforest, home to bands of pygmies, in order to establish a camp there. He built an infirmary, a hotel and a rearing station for local exotic animals, especially the okapi. Playing host to wealthy tourists and visiting journalists in search of sensationalist copy, he had the pygmies whom he befriended and whose language he learnt stage spectacles of their lifestyle. He also made money by selling animals to Western zoos, masks to Western museums, and—when the market was right—local commodities to Western traders. When none of that provided enough, he begged from his patrician father. By the 1950s his health was so poor that it affected his behaviour and he spent his last year as a half-crazed tyrant destroying what he had created.

Such a good story can be read in many different ways. First, it is the psychological report of a neglected child whose adult version surrounds himself with people he

loves and who in turn love him. Secondly, it is a postcolonial critique of those who helped the indigenes and simultaneously helped themselves. Thirdly, it is the tale (of Haggardian excess or Conradian darkness) of a self-exiled failure who had to go to an outpost of Empire in order to establish a petty kingdom of his own. Fourthly, it is the story of an incurable, diseased romantic whose first wife dies on him, whose second wife divorces him, and who dies on his third wife—all the time having local wives as well. Finally, it is an example of the popularization of anthropology. Putnam knew pygmy ways extremely well but never wrote anything of consequence. Instead, he assisted anthropologists (above all Colin Turnbull) and helped to feed the Western fascination with tropical hunter-gatherers physically distinct from Europeans.

It is a many-stranded tale of its times and Mark tells it well. Her book aids our understanding of the complexities and contradictions of the colonial encounter and serves to place the production of anthropological knowledge in its cross-cultural contexts. For these reasons anthropologists may benefit from its reading.

JEREMY MACCLANCY

JUNE HELM, *Prophecy and Power among the Dogrib Indians* (Studies in the Anthropology of North American Indians), Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press 1994. 172 pp., Appendix, Reference, Index. £28.50.

ARMIN W. GEERTZ, *The Invention of Prophecy: Continuity and Meaning in Hopi Indian Religion*, Berkeley, etc.: University of California Press 1994. xxi, 490 pp., Photos, Charts, Maps, Appendixes, Bibliography, Index. \$40.00.

The Dogrib are Athapaskan-speaking peoples of the Mackenzie District of the Northwest Territories in Canada. The present work is not a study of Dogrib culture, but an account of five personalities involved in 'the Dogrib prophet movement' of the late 1960s and early 1970s, plus the author's principal informant and assistant. The first part of the book, 'Three Styles in the Practice of Prophecy', offers no explanation of the movement as such but instead describes the way three prophets presented themselves and the responses of the people around them, exploring the quite various ways the prophets came to prophecy and the rather different reactions they caused. As she comments, 'the ethnography of the Dogrib prophet movement makes rather tame telling'. There were no millenarian dreams, and their prophecy was entirely in line with Catholic expectations. The several chapters of the second part of the book explore the implications of the term *ink'on*, sometimes translated by the Dogrib as 'luck' or 'magic', by means of anecdotal narratives by her assistant Vital Thomas, whose autobiography forms the final chapter. There is a brief appendix on Dogrib leadership.

Geertz's book is empirically more substantial and intellectually more ambitious. Analytically it is eclectic, drawing inspiration from the post-modernists to the likes of Victor Turner, Roy Wagner and Max Weber. Prophecy can be a large topic, as it is in this book, and Geertz makes too many analytic points about it to permit narrowing his message down to a single interpretation. Nevertheless, perhaps the main theme of the book is that despite claims to precognition, Hopi prophecy is not really precognitive. Prophecies frequently appear decades after the facts referred to in them and in any case incorporate contemporary events into a traditional framework of discourse having to do with the Hopi emergence myth. This framework is common to all Hopi and is independent of the political content given to it at any particular moment. As a form prophecy is collective, and Geertz even argues that there are prophecies but no prophets. This position is somewhat paradoxical, since the book analyses a series of prophecies made by specific men for, apparently, specific political reasons in the period from 1830 to 1989.

Hopi prophecy centres on the prediction of the end of the world in the emergence myth and is often associated with destructive acts intended to bring about the end of the world or steps taken to ameliorate its consequences, depending upon the viewpoint of the individual prophet. Prophecy is political and propelled by the dynamics of Hopi factionalism. Geertz incorporates a good deal of Hopi political history into his account, down to and including Hopi political use of flying saucer cults and the question of interaction with Indian hobbyists, 'hippies', New Agers and other American and European well-wishers and imitators. One late chapter is devoted to such 'cultural madness'. As the preface makes explicit, this book too is intended to play a political role as a corrective to the attitudes of those listed above and as a critique of Hopi traditionalists and their White supporters. It contains a formidable scholarly apparatus, as well as materials drawn from a wide variety of media. There are many histrionic people in this book, and Geertz evidences histrionic touches too, perhaps inevitably when so many before him have been tempted to assume the guise of the salvation-providing White Brother of Hopi myth. The reader comes away, if not entirely convinced of every individual argument, then at least with a sense of having been very thoroughly introduced to the complexities of contemporary Hopi life.

R. H. BARNES

R. H. JOHANNES, *Words of the Lagoon: Fishing and Marine Lore in the Palau District of Micronesia*, Berkeley, etc.: University of California Press 1992. xi, 245 pp., Map, Tables, Figures, Photographs, Appendixes, Bibliography, Index. \$15.00.

Originally published in 1981, this is the paperback edition of a book by a marine biologist about fishing technology and knowledge on Palau. Johannes claims that the

elder fishermen of Palau have an extensive understanding of the behaviour of very many species of tropical fish that vastly exceeds what is known to marine biology. His aim is 'to discover what Westerners can learn about tropical marine ecosystems and their resources by investigating the knowledge and actions of native fishermen and by observing their impact on these resources'. Having gone to Palau with an ecological hypothesis, he soon found that political, cultural and economic factors made his biological explanations inadequate. 'I gained more new (to marine science) information during sixteen months of fieldwork using this approach than I had during the previous fifteen years using more conventional research techniques'.

The book is written in an easily accessible style, while presenting much of interest to laymen, biologists and anthropologists. It was pleasing, for example, to find that Palau fishing kites use the same spider-web lure to entrap needlefish as did those which once were found in the Solor Strait in eastern Indonesia. Never having seen one, I was most grateful to find that Johannes had included a photograph of such a lure. Johannes begins with a description of Palau fishing methods, both ancient and recently introduced. He next discusses yearly, monthly and daily rhythms of fish and fishermen, with much attention to spawning behaviour and a good discussion of the adjustment of the local lunar calendar to the star calendar. He then takes up traditional conservation methods, the question of improving reef and lagoon fishing and (with P. W. Black) fishing in the South West Islands. Subsequent chapters cover island currents, fishhooks, and fish species. A final chapter assesses claims concerning the unexpected habits of various varieties of fish, such as the cornet fish, which sticks its snout between the jaws of the moray eel in order to eviscerate the eel (true), and the octopus, which allegedly gives live birth in trees (biologically impossible, though often witnessed by Palauans). An Appendix is devoted to reproductive rhythms, spawning locations, good fishing days and seasonal migrations of fish. A second covers the lunar rhythms of crustaceans, and a third describes the use and construction of a variety of fishhooks. There is a glossary of Palauan words and another of Toba words. From an anthropological point of view the book is an invaluable contribution to the study of local technical knowledge and is of considerable comparative interest. It is attractively decorated with drawings of fish made by an anonymous Palauan and first published in 1929.

R. H. BARNES

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