

BOOK REVIEW

"ANTHROPOLOGY IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA"

Readings from the Encyclopaedia of Papua New Guinea. (Edited by Ian Hogbin, Melbourne University Press 1973 250 pp.)

In Papua New Guinea rural development is a much discussed topic. Agriculturalists are naturally deeply involved in rural development problems, but in the past they have tended to concentrate on the technical aspects of agriculture at the expense of human factors. To overcome the deficiency, agricultural training in Papua New Guinea now includes an increasing Social Science content. Unfortunately social science teachers here are hindered by the lack of suitable texts. The publication of a book of readings in "Anthropology in Papua New Guinea" should therefore be welcomed by social science teachers and agriculturists alike. I suspect, however, that both groups are likely to be disappointed with this book.

The readings have been selected by Ian Hogbin from the anthropological entries he collected for the "Encyclopaedia of Papua New Guinea" in 1967. Some of the entries have been revised for this book, but most are essentially the same as the Encyclopaedia, despite the editors claim to the contrary. Experienced teachers and professional agriculturalists will find some of the papers very useful, especially Marie de Lepervanche's "Social Structure" and Thomas Harding's "Land Tenure". However, the majority of students and field officers in Papua New Guinea will find the language and presentation of the book too difficult.

Who then will find the book useful? Judging by the concern for correct anthropological definitions shown by some of the writers, especially de Lepervanche, it seems that the book is intended as a University text. If this is so, then serious students will be concerned at the failures of many writers, including Chowning, T. Scarlett Epstein,

Harding and Peter Lawrence, to give references in their texts to the sources of their material. It may be that this is due to the original use of the papers in an encyclopaedia, but it seems a pity that this omission was not corrected for this book.

The book lays itself open for a more serious criticism, however. This arises from the "Western bias" of the authors. All the writers are academics from universities in Australia, England and the United States. They have visited Papua New Guinea and worked here, but their interpretation of what they saw is determined by the language of Western Social Science. This is most obvious in the chapter on "Economy" where Western myths on the "hindrances to economic growth" caused by traditional social values and land tenure are repeated *ad nauseum* without any evidence to back the statements. This Western bias is evident, to some degree in all chapters.

Malinowski, the great pioneer anthropologist, was acutely aware of the problems of interpreting Melanesian society for Western consumption. In 1929 he wrote "to reach the reader I have to rely upon his personal experiences which are built up in our own Society . . . I have . . . to translate Melanesian conditions into our own". The contributors to this book are translating Melanesian conditions into their own; this is unavoidable. Unfortunately they seem to have lost Malinowski's awareness that they are doing this. The result is that they frequently stray from a factual description of their material into a judgement of Melanesian society in terms of their own values.

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