

to rationalize policies which would destroy the positive social and economic importance of these (*banjar*) institutions'' (p. 231).

In terms of scope and issues covered, the book is an important addition to the discussion of contemporary problems in anthropology and those endeavouring to understand the cultural dynamics of Southeast Asia will greatly profit from reading this slim volume.

References Cited

Geertz, Clifford

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Smith, R.J.

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Twisted Histories, Altered Contexts: Representing the Chambri in a World System

Deborah Gewertz and Frederick Errington

New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991. xiv + 264 pp. \$44.50 (cloth), \$14.95 (paper)

Reviewer: Margaret C. Rodman
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The Chambri were the female-dominated Tchambuli in Margaret Mead's 1935 study, *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies*. The seeming isolation of this Sepik River society in New Guinea provided Mead with a "natural laboratory" in which she could demonstrate that gender roles were culturally shaped, not biologically given. Gewertz and Errington, recognizing the illusion of the Chambri's isolation and disillusioned with positivist epistemologies, write the Chambri differently.

They focus on "twisted histories," relations of entailment that recursively entwine individuals and events, past and present, the Chambri and the West. Their particular interest is in the "altered contexts" that the process of development, especially tourism, has created.

The book draws on Gewertz's fieldwork in the Chambri Lake region beginning in 1974 but relies most heavily on research she and Errington conducted there in 1987. The authors' lives are spun into the thread of the histories they describe. They became resource people for both Westerners and Chambri. They served as anthropological guides on the "Melanesian Explorer," a luxury tourist ship that cruised the Sepik River and offered side trips by speedboat to Chambri Lake. They and the local man they trained as an ethnographer became resources for the Chambri as inscribers of "tradition" in a world in which literacy has powerful implications.

Although Gewertz and Errington are part of the story, their main interest is in writing what they call a "collective biography" composed of the interlocking narratives of Chambri lives. They write about newly initiated Chambri boys who exposed their bloody backs to the tourist gaze; they contemplate freedom and youth in the context

of a local rock star's death. These are compelling stories that, in paying attention to the intersections between our world and theirs, give the Chambri individuals they write about a wonderful immediacy. First-year students would find this book interesting and provocative. I found it hard to put down.

One reason the book works so well is that the authors acknowledge the agency of Chambri individuals while also pointing out their limited awareness of and control over the "altered contexts" in which they live. Government-sponsored development education has encouraged Chambri to believe that they can control the course of development through the choices they make. (The book begins with a nice quotation to this effect that the authors found in a Chambri girl's school notebook left in their privy.) But the horizons framing those choices are no longer regional, as when the Iatmul dominated the system of "commensurate differences" that linked the Chambri and their neighbours. Now the horizons are global ones based on incommensurate differences of development. The Chambri's best hope for the future was to maintain their autonomy by preserving their subsistence base. But their choices endangered the very autonomy they wanted to preserve.

The book explores this irony in a number of contexts. Inviting tourists to the initiation and building a traditional men's house for them threatened the traditional system the Chambri sought to strengthen. In a chapter on life in town, the authors show that young Chambri who left the lake in search of urban freedom put the rural social system based on entailments at risk; yet youths continued to be protected by that system when they sought sanctuary with "wantok" kin after breaking the law. A chapter on literacy considers the irony that preserving traditional knowledge by writing it down, in the Chambri ethnographer's frustrated attempt to create a Chambri Bible, threatened the individual power of big men. Gewertz and Errington conclude, in a not entirely convincing display of noblesse oblige, that their roles as American ethnographers were different from their Chambri protégés. As representatives of the system that had imposed itself on the Chambri, the authors argue, they had an obligation to understand the encounter between systems. This they did, but not by considering much that went on beyond Chambri experience. What they have done best is to offer us a wealth of poignant insights into the ironies of life in the Chambri world of intersecting worlds. The altered contexts of development have indeed given Chambri histories new, often unpredictable twists that make fascinating reading.

Reference Cited

Mead, Margaret

1935 *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies*. New York: Morrow.

Postmodernism, Feminism, and Cultural Politics

Henry A. Giroux, ed.

Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1991. x + 308 pp. \$16.95 (paper)

Reviewer: Michael Manson

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For some time the mass media have been proclaiming that we are living in the post-feminist era. More recently, they have been glibly dismissing "political correctness"