

development programs without de-legitimizing one's own position in the field (see Mosse 2005). Considering these two pitfalls, the book challenges us to assess the role of engaged anthropologists in processes of change in Latin America and elsewhere.

These critical remarks notwithstanding, I recommend this book to those interested in EIB, education policies and the history of schooling in Latin America. Additionally, this book offers novel insights for anthropologists, political scientists and others working on indigenous resurgence. Given the worldwide gaze on Bolivia's current indigenous regime, it valuably reminds readers of the historical roots behind the struggles that made the Bolivian state representative for its indigenous majority. The book also reminds us that indigenous struggles are never purely local: instead, they are formed out of local resurgence, transnational development encounters, and national histories, crystallized in the politics of knowledge.

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RUPERT STASCH. *Society of Others: Kinship and Mourning in a West Papuan Place*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2009. Pp. 336. ISBN: 978-0-520-25685-9 (hardback); 978-0-520-25686-6 (paperback).

Social relations are often depicted as being based on pure mutual identification, both by popular discourse as well as by anthropologists. Following Ferdinand Tönnies' contrast of *Gemeinschaft*, a community based on relations of pure identification, such as kinship, and *Gesellschaft*, relations based on calculating instrumentality, small scale or tribal societies have often been seen as a prototype of *Gemeinschaft*. According to this popular stereotype,

tribal sociality is based on undifferentiated, space-based unity of consciousness. For good reasons, this view has been criticised by anthropologists, who have shown that small-scale communities are rarely internally homogenous. As Rupert Stasch (p. 9) notes, even more recent studies attempting to move away from this tradition by studying large-scale or global structures often implicitly reinforce the *Gemeinschaft* stereotype; precisely by turning away from 'the local' as an object of study it is implied that understanding small-scale social organisation comprises studying communities based on pure identification.

As so-called tribal societies are emblematic of relations of pure identification, in an analogous vein the Korowai of West Papua are—at least in popular depictions—a stereotypic tribal society made famous through exoticising descriptions of their impressive tree houses and seeming remoteness. In his book, Rupert Stasch sets out to counter the notions both of social relations as based on pure identification and of tribal societies as being based on such relations. On the contrary, Stasch shows how the Korowai, an egalitarian and dispersed people living in the low-land forested area of West Papua, regard social relations of all kinds to be based first of all on notions of otherness, or more precisely, all social relations are to the Korowai contradictory unities of close intimacy and distant otherness of varying degrees. Moreover, the Korowai are not only preoccupied with otherness as such, but with otherness *as* a relation, that is, as 'a quality through and around which people are mutually close' (p. 4). Otherness as difference also invites and enables the building of relationships.

It is one thing to say social relationships among the Korowai are conceptualised first of all through notions of otherness, but Stasch very convincingly sets out to study how and through what media social relationships are enacted, thus giving his study concrete points of departure into a very abstract topic. Korowai residential patterns constitute one of these media of relationships with which Stasch begins his analysis. Valuing egalitarianism and autonomy, the Korowai live in relatively small households dispersed from each other in order not to intrude and interfere in the life of others. In order to avoid conflict, everybody should have their own place to live and resources to use. Thus, as Stasch (p. 20) puts it, the Korowai landscape is a field of otherness and of belonging to their surroundings. Separateness is thus a form of relatedness for the Korowai. Relations are conceptualised spatially and through places: children continue to inhabit and work where their parents did, while marriage, for example, implies spatial otherness, because a spouse is by definition a person from 'elsewhere'.

A combination of closeness and remoteness is manifested also in one of the most valued relationships among the Korowai. Uncle relationships combine close social attachment with geographic separation: an uncle belonging to another clan is a valued relationship to the ego, while often living far away. The relationship is valued precisely *because* of this mutual strangeness (p. 114). Through avuncular relations people can have a sense of belonging to other places and visit them. Places, people and experiences that differ from the daily routine of the Korowai have an aesthetic quality to them. Equally, the most affective relationships, namely those between parents and children, are also a 'mismatch' of closeness and otherness: newborn children are at first seen as demonic and repulsive, but attachment is created in time through 'histories of caring action' (p. 169). Children are of their parents and ideally continue their work, but they also constitute 'others' both

in body and time. Children, who outlive their parents, link them to different times and are also signs of their parents' passing (p. 171).

The Korowai place great emphasis both on the spatial and temporal aspects of relationships. Relations are acted out across space and made of events. Stasch notes that this is a universal characteristic of social relationships, but it could be noted that there are also culturally specific aspects to it. Through the relatively immovable landscape, people can conceptualise, see, touch and feel their relatedness, which is important for the Korowai, for whom the subjective interiority of other persons is not knowable. Stasch (p. 259) also relates this focus on the materiality of relationships to a particular political culture. Just as the Korowai are averse to knowing the inner thoughts of a particular person (except through material signs), they also dislike telling each other what to do. Thus relationships are easier when acted out over a 'buffer of spatial separation' that allows for great autonomy. Relationships are also formed through events in time, and are lost in time. Thus relationships are constantly in the making and are then by definition unstable and fragile; as Stasch notes, this contradicts the usual perception of stable relations based on mutual identification in small-scale communities. The focus on the material signs of relationships amounts to an indigenous pragmatics; that is, the Korowai define what they are to each other by signifying it through various media of contact on which Stasch focuses in the different chapters of his book.

Like Ira Bashkow's *The Meaning of Whitemen* (2006), which provided a new point of view onto the question of cultural boundaries, Stasch's *The Society of Others* makes us think about otherness in a fresh way. Touching on a wide array of topics, *The Society of Others* is an extremely rich book, combining careful ethnographic analysis with far-reaching theoretical claims. It offers a significant contribution to the anthropology of space and place as well as studies about kinship by focusing on the media through which relations are conceptualised and materialised. Due to its richness, it is also a difficult book to summarise adequately in such a short review. While *The Society of Others* is a book about the Korowai of West Papua, its subject—what social relationships are and how we can examine them—is of universal interest to anthropologists and should by no means be thought of as an area-specific study. On the contrary, this book should be read by anyone interested in anthropology, since it forces us to think in new ways about the most central concepts of the discipline.

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