

context would be different. Because he failed to accurately explain the institutions, I find myself unable to agree with his conclusions.

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*Secrecy and Cultural Reality: Utopian Ideologies of the New Guinea Men's House*, by Gilbert Herdt. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003. ISBN cloth, 0-472-09761-X; paper, 0-472-06761-3; xvii + 269 pages, map, photograph, notes, bibliography, index. Cloth, US\$64.95; paper, US\$26.95.

In this thoughtful book, Gilbert Herdt proposes a general theory on secrecy by contrasting its uses and historical transformations in Melanesia and in the west. In chapter one, Herdt analyzes how early anthropological approaches to ritual secrecy were popularized. In the nineteenth century, millions of white middle-class American men turned to native Indian religion, to a certain romanticization of the primitive and the wild, to create secret male societies. In later chapters, Herdt uses his Sambian fieldwork to argue for the utopian aspects of secrecy in traditional Melanesia and the historical reconstitution of secrecy with pacification and Christianization. A renowned ethnographer of customary male initiation practices and the forms of subjectivity and selfhood these produced, Herdt shows himself to be a subtle thinker of social change as transformations in secrecy. Among the Yagwoia, the missionaries sought

to stop letting new recruits into the secrets of the men's house. Older men started to confine the secrets to themselves, perfecting the exchange and idealization of themselves before their secrets vanished. Herdt explores powerfully the pathos of cultural loss, of cultural treasures passed on since times immemorial but now halted.

This is also the pathos of being robbed of one's sons, of the memorializing power of the living ritually directed toward the dead. It was also the castration and demasculinization of a world. Today, missionaries have laid claims to the souls of the young who receive Christian names not grounded in ancestral myths, songs, and places. Christianity also brings new ways of hanging on to one's soul as part of its processes for creating identity and moral order. Its understanding and practices about losing and reclaiming one's spirit or hidden self replace those of initiation and anti-sorcery rituals. By offering heaven, Christianity also removes souls to another world, making it difficult to maintain customary social conceptions of the dead as available for any kind of dialogue.

Herdt accuses anthropologists of negative western attitudes toward secrecy, based on liberal-democratic consensual views of social order. He also accuses them of privileging the rational, political, and utilitarian, by always reducing belief to ideology. Rituals and myths of origin are not just contrivances for justifying male power. Men are not just cynical manipulators; they believe in the hidden reality of the beliefs and objects that provide their political weapons and ideological resources. Instead of

downplaying belief and conviction in favor of instrumental views of human behavior, Herdt emphasizes the alternative realities created by ritual secrecy. Here Herdt does not go far enough in his cultural relativism and has too homogenous a view of the relations engendered by ritual secrecy. He takes his Sambian model of layers of disclosing truths as the ultimate model for a precontact cosmology. But what of a world where cynicism is culturally formed and mediated by folk psychologies and that may be closer to a Nietzschean view of sociality as grounded in masks and necessary lies? Herdt too hastily dismisses Barth's sense of the "deception felt in secret" among the Baktaman (144). Perhaps this sense was part of the pathos of life, a sense of a necessary lie that did not contradict belief but was part of a sense of truth always escaping and being something more than its present partial articulations. Why should men's cynicism be set up in opposition to belief and ontologies? Why can't there be an ontology of masking, deceptions, and cynicism?

Herdt rightly praises Donald Tuzin for studying the forms of doubt, guilt, and torment experienced by Iahita men over their secret monsters or tambaran cult, but for Herdt these emotions are the result of forms of self-reflection introduced with colonial change. While I agree that colonial agents institute a culture of guilt that forms their hegemony, fundamental human emotions like guilt, cynicism, and self-reflection cannot be confined to given historical periods even though those emotions can be reengaged for specific historical ends. In the Kaliai area, male guilt was

encoded in traditional stories of female ghosts pursuing the men who ritually killed widows, and men bringing the tambaran's vomited pork to share with their families. I agree with Herdt that with pacification, the violence previously directed outward can move into a village to exacerbate gender relations and the moral crisis men feel. However, men's unease over lies and the hoarding of food cannot be reduced to western-imposed understandings of emotions or informants remirroring their ethnographer's middle-class values.

Herdt rightly argues that Christianity has created a culture of guilt, which regards secrecy as antisocial. Thus empowered, women can "scorn men today because they feel they were 'duped' by the 'fictions' and 'fraudulent' traditions of their men" (199). Ironically, women's naiveness did not often exist in tradition, though feigning naiveness was present. Dismissing many ethnographic documentations of men's torment over their secret ritual life, Herdt claims ritual torment "is unusual in New Guinea but by no means unknown" (203). He accuses ethnographers like Ian Hogbin of not having paid sufficient attention to historical change as its possible cause. This is a more difficult criticism to make of Tuzin who is said to capture "an extremely precious and rare historical moment of reflection by insiders about their own secrecy" (203). Yet Tuzin has argued this was not a one-off observation by informants.

Acknowledging the socially divisive effects of custom, Herdt claims these did not produce "internal suffering or conflict" (208). But why should self-reflection and guilt be modern arti-

facts? They are certainly remobilized and reconstituted by modernity. Herdt even reads evidence of colonial destabilization into ethnography where women admit that “they had always assumed the men were lying when they spoke of gigantic people-eating monsters, adolescent initiates being turned into flying foxes, and other improbabilities” (Tuzin, *The Cassowary’s Revenge* [1997, 161], quoted in Herdt, 208). Yet here it is Herdt who cannot handle such cynicism where women know; and the men can know that the women know; and the women can know that the men know that women know. What changes is the nature and meaning of such complexities, such public secrets. In New Britain tumbuan ceremonies, which have dancing masks, how could the women not recognize the crooked or missing toes and fingers of masked husbands, fathers, and brothers; how could the men not see that their female relatives saw these glaring disclosures and, moreover, that the women could see the men seeing what women saw? It is this sort of complexity of knowing what not to know, and not knowing what one knows, that is missing from Herdt’s work and that Michael Taussig has highlighted in *Defacement* (1999). For Herdt, though, guilt “is certainly a complex subjectivity; it signifies the intrusion of unwanted self-consciousness that was formerly alien to the ontology of ritual secrecy” (208). A taken-for-granted reality is now in subjective turmoil, a “natural reality” becomes split into “genuine” and “false” motives, what was repressed and unconscious become conscious, and the individual is torn between a

true and false self. There is much that is perceptive here, especially about the way western hegemony operates through problematizing the “native” self. But can moral misgivings or cynicism be situated in historical binary opposites? A conflict between the true and false self can be historically induced and exploited, as is guilt, but I do not agree that guilt, cynicism, and self-reflection are modern subjective forms for men, rather than historically engaged and reformulated subjectivities. In Herdt’s history of secrecy, Melanesians move from total belief in the contents of their secrets to a cynical belief in the need for the effects secrecy provides.

Herdt has perceptive things to say about historical change: how secrecy becomes individualized, privatized, and relocated inside the lone person to overburden the self. This has given rise to psychoanalysis and a discovery of the unconscious, of what hides in the mind to protect the self. For Herdt, the project of self-awareness can become historicized and linked to forms of racial domination and to a moral problematization of tradition and personhood. Here Christianity promises to alleviate with salvation and redemption the guilt and remorse it produced inside individuals and which supposedly had hitherto been unknown. For Herdt, traditional warfare created an all-or-nothing reality, a premodern absolutism; there could be no half-truths or cynicism in a world requiring total trust between men. I am not convinced there was just one way to create a premodern social order—through totalizing absolute truths that must be entirely believed.

I fundamentally disagree with Herdt when he asserts: “To interpret ritual secrecy as a lie or hoax, or primarily as a sham or game, was to underrate the wonderfully terrifying complexities of Melanesian precolonial life” (220). Those accused of this sin (Barth, Hogbin, Tuzin, and Read) have produced some of the richest ethnography of men’s house cultures. Herdt cannot accept ethnography that documents the ambiguous and ambivalent nature of public secrecy, the nature of the complicities (and the complicity with complicity) that made social life possible. All Melanesia is assimilated to his Sambian model of ritual secrecy as progressively disclosing truths. Here Herdt suffers from the sin he projects onto those he accuses of having “ignored the social contradictions of these sociocultural systems, so rich and intricately layered in public and secret subjectivities and practices” (220). Herdt briefly touches on what other anthropologists were tapping into, namely, a pride and pleasure by men in successfully staging ritual secrets, but this homosocial pleasure in male artifice is never ontologically explored. Why couldn’t this self-reflexive pleasure in one’s ability to stage and produce a virtual world not also imply an ontology of the need for fictions, of the generative power of lies, and of folding women back into relations of complicity with what they originally created—artifice? To treat ritual as a lie is not necessarily to say it is empty, as Herdt often assumes. Instead it can entail an analysis of the ontological dimension to a social order built on lies created in a mythological past from the procreative powers of

women. The myths linking initiation rituals with secrecy and the procreative powers of woman are, as Herdt and Bamberger point out, partly about men’s secret appropriation of women’s powers of reproduction, but they may also be about the procreative nature of secrecy and fictions.

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*Raiding the Land of the Foreigners: The Limits of the Nation on an Indonesian Frontier*, by Danilyn Rutherford. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003. ISBN 0-691-09591-4, xxii + 296 pages, figures, maps, photographs, glossary, notes, references, index. Paper, US\$25.95.

The western half of New Guinea—West Papua, Papua, or Irian Jaya, depending on your political taste—tends to fall between the two chairs of Pacific and Southeast Asian studies; closed, politically, to most scholars of the Pacific, but also somehow alien to Southeast Asianists. The Indonesian state’s often-harsh repression of West Papua calls for autonomy or independence has seen the province closed to scrutiny by foreigners, including researchers, for much of the past forty years. This ambitious and theoretically sophisticated ethnography of contemporary society on the island of Biak, which lies off the north coast of the main island of New Guinea, is the product of one of the rare windows of research opportunity that opened during this period.

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