

*Perspectives on the Bird's Head of Irian Jaya, Indonesia: Proceedings of the Conference, Leiden, 13–17 October 1997*, edited by Jelle Miedema, Cecilia Odé, and Rien A C Dam. Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1998. ISBN 90-420-0644-7, xiii + 982 pages, maps, figures, tables, notes, references. \$178.50.

The ISIR project (Irian Jaya Studies, a program for Interdisciplinary Research) and its predecessor, the IRIS project, have provided a framework for joint Dutch-Indonesian research in Irian Jaya (West Papua) since 1990. This weighty volume of proceedings from an ISIR-sponsored conference at Leiden University provides a comprehensive overview of current Netherlands-based research on Indonesia's easternmost province. Together with the IRIS project's series of archival materials, this is the most substantial body of work published on Irian Jaya since the similarly region-focused German Mek Project of the 1970s. The prompt publication of some forty-two papers from the Leiden conference is commendable, and the volume is essential reading for anyone interested in the region.

Perhaps inevitably, the quality of contributions is somewhat mixed, ranging from research proposals through preliminary field reports to polished concluding statements. A thousand pages later, it's also hard to avoid the conclusion that the ISIR project's interdisciplinary ambitions—covering anthropology, demography, ethnohistory, history, linguistics, geology, botany, and archaeology—may have owed more to the politics of Dutch research funding than to a clear

sense of the need for cross-disciplinary scholarship. An obvious unity is supplied by the focus on a restricted part of Irian Jaya—the Bird's Head at the western tip of the main island of New Guinea—but there is little evidence, at least at this stage, for much successful integration of results from the different disciplines.

A split is apparent among the ethnographic papers, which make up the bulk of the volume, between an older guard of Dutch scholars and their students. Papers by Jelle Miedema, Jan Pouwer, and Paul Haenen address Bird's Head myth from the well-established perspective of Dutch structuralism, albeit with an increasing attention to historical sources and evidence for population movements. Their students, including Dianne van Oosterhout, Jaap Timmer, Louise Thoonen, and Ien Courtens, advance considerably broader and more theoretically eclectic arguments on matters such as indigenous reformulations of Christianity and transformations in concepts of fertility and healing. What all of these papers share is a developing interest in the specific, and not simply diachronic, history of engagement between the indigenous and the external. The section on Bird's Head history, with contributions by F Huizinga, Tom Goodman, Jeroen Overweel, and P J Drooglever, demonstrates clearly the wealth of documentary sources available for such a project, and points the way to a more productive synthesis of its individual components.

Two final sections, on linguistics, and on geology, botany and archaeology, contain individual gems, such as the papers by linguists William Foley and Andrew Pawley, but little evidence

of resonance with the rest of the volume. One exception is Ger Reesink's paper proposing a "*Sprachbund*" of mixed languages extending throughout the Bird's Head and the adjacent Raja Empat and North Molucca areas, which nicely muddies the genetic waters and suggests a means of integrating the archaeological, linguistic, historical, and ethnographical perspectives on the complex process of cultural exchanges across this border-transgressing region.

There are some troubling aspects to this volume, central among them the apparent lack of exchange between Dutch and Indonesian or Irianese scholars. In a remarkably forthright keynote address, E K M Masinambow, of the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI), takes his Dutch hosts to task for the project's failure to develop lasting collaborative frameworks for research. Instead, he suggests, "Indonesian participation is mostly confined to sponsorship functions to fulfill official requirement for non-Indonesian researchers to carry out fieldwork in Indonesia" (29). This ought to ring bells for researchers elsewhere in the Pacific. Dutch and Indonesian research interests are increasingly divergent, as the former bring theoretical developments to bear on their research design, while much Indonesian social science continues to be directed toward the country's development goals; all the more reason, says Masinambow, to regard the ISIR project as a missed opportunity for mutual education.

Having also worked in Irian Jaya for much of the period of the ISIR project, I find the absence of any discussion of political developments, or

the blunter matter of human rights abuse, astonishing. Other than brief references to the "security situation" in the papers by Timmer, Sarlito Wirawan Sarwono, and Aprilani Soegiarto, there is no hint of any of the issues that have preoccupied many Irianese people during the last decade, such as the accelerating pace of immigration from elsewhere in Indonesia, the loss of land and of employment opportunities, or the debate over independence and autonomy. In a volume marking the culmination of a decade of collaborative research in Irian Jaya, the absence of even a single indigenous contributor is disappointing, particularly when Irianese researchers such as Jos Mansoben and Naffi Sanggenafa have written extensively on Bird's Head ethnography and history. Authors have been sought to provide comparative material from elsewhere in Indonesia and New Guinea, and the papers by David Mearns, Christopher Healey, Volker Heesch, Andrew Strathern, and Pamela Stewart fulfill this function admirably. Yet the inclusion in the volume of papers such as Sarwono's, a very thin analysis of the "psychology" of the Amungme and Kamoro communities in the area of the Freeport mine, is puzzling: with thirty years of abuse of their basic human rights to reflect on, Amungme graduates who have written about the history of their community will indeed be interested to learn that they "think in the present tense only" (359). That said, Sarwono's paper is a revealing illustration of Javanese and bureaucratic perceptions of Irianese people, and of the seeming impossibility of dialogue between them. Now there's

a challenge for the next Dutch-Indonesian project in Irian Jaya.

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*Across the Great Divide: Journeys in History and Anthropology*, by Bronwen Douglas. *Studies in History and Anthropology*, 24. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1998. ISBN 90-5702-306-7; xviii + 358 pages, maps, illustrations, tables, notes, bibliography, index. US\$52; A\$94.

Specialists in Pacific studies should make room on their shelves for this book; I would place it in the same section as holds Marshall Sahlins, Gayannath Obeyesekere, and Greg Denning.

Douglas hails from the Melbourne school of island-centered history. During the past thirty years she has written numerous authoritative essays on the Melanesian Islanders of French New Caledonia. These have ranged in focus from Kanak interaction with the early (1840s) Catholic missionaries to reflections on current politicking for independence (or at least increased Kanak rule in the islands).

I greeted *Across the Great Divide* with great enthusiasm, as will other followers of Douglas's work. I was happy at the prospect of Douglas presenting a bigger picture of New Caledonian history and relieved that this picture would be easily available in a book—no more tracking down numerous articles in a wide variety of journals. My anticipation was richly rewarded, yet not quite in the manner I'd anticipated. *Across the Great*

*Divide* is a retrospective presentation of Douglas's career as a historian. Most of the chapters have appeared previously as essays in journals. Theoretical reflections and developments provide the unifying framework for the book. Those who anticipate a coherent historical narrative—a type of Islander-centered, anticolonial history of nineteenth and twentieth century New Caledonia—will be disappointed. On the other hand, this book will appeal to the theoretically inclined among historians and anthropologists; Douglas delves deep into the epistemological problems of recuperating an authentically Kanak perspective on nineteenth (and some twentieth) century events. She strives to “denaturalize conventional categorical boundaries, anchor abstractions and mediate oppositions; to explore ways of knowing indigenous pasts and identifying indigenous agency through critical readings of colonial texts” (1).

A historian by training, Douglas nonetheless presents this book in terms of her own engagement with anthropology. Her intellectual travels began in the 1960s, when Aboriginal struggles for rights inspired her scholarship, continued through the 1970s with engagement in Geertzian ethnography, then proceeded through the discovery of how to “read” documents for hegemonic narratives (of racism and conquest) and conquered voices (of the Kanak), until finally reaching the climax, in the late 1990s, of a deeply nonrealist, anti-objectivist, multivocal postmodernism. This testimony of intellectual voyaging is its own form of history that will prove valuable for those interested in the history of Pacific studies. The most