Editor’s Introduction

Francesca Merlan

Editing and evaluating the work of Marie Olive Reay

The book before you was found in 2011, seven years after the death of its author, Marie Olive Reay, and about 50 years after she had made last amendments to the manuscript—probably around 1965. *Wives and Wanderers* presents vivid, ethnographically based narrative of the lives of women of the Wahgi Valley, in the Central Highlands of Papua New Guinea. Reay explores the experiences of courting, attraction, love, marriage, and the combination of male dominance and barely restrained female resentment and rebelliousness which she found to be characteristic of this setting. Reay’s attention was focused on what she saw as a radical discontinuity in the socialization of women in this part of New Guinea: a contrast between considerable freedom enjoyed by young women in the choice of male partners with whom to court before marriage, versus the sudden and dramatic deprivation of their freedom upon marriage. She saw marriage as a traumatic, often violence-laden experience in their lives.

Had it appeared earlier, *Wives and Wanderers* would have had a central place in the anthropological literature on Papua New Guinean societies, especially those of the Central Highlands. And it would have been the foundational, indeed the first, book on women’s lives in that part of the world. But we must wonder about these hypotheticals.

First, we may ask why the work did not appear in Reay’s lifetime? Reay was otherwise a fairly steady author; and she had worked on this manuscript for a long time. Some of the ethnography upon which it is based goes back to Reay’s first fieldwork in the New Guinea Highlands, in the early 1950s. Why, then, did she not publish it? What considerations, perhaps hesitations, may have kept her from doing so? This Introduction offers some suggestions.

And second, though it lay unpublished so long, *Wives and Wanderers* remains amazingly contemporary. Through publication now, it may yet find a place in the anthropological literatures of Highlands Papua New Guinea, and of feminism, on grounds explored in this Editor’s Introduction. At any rate, its continuing social relevance is not to be doubted. Though it is based on Reay’s ethnographic documentation of gender relations near Minj in the Wahgi Valley...
Wives and Wanderers in a New Guinea Highlands Society: Women’s Lives in the Wahgi Valley

in the 1950s and 1960s, much that it records remains characteristic today: its emphasis on male dominance and privilege, men’s desires and efforts to marry multiply, women’s responses and resistance to marriage arrangements, and the physical confrontation and violence involved in these relations.

Important changes have also taken place in the Highlands since Reay wrote this book. But this recently-found work can still shed light on concerns long explored in the fulsome Melanesianist literature on gender relations, as well as upon gender issues recently articulated in new ways, such as the concern with gender-based violence in these societies. And consideration here of Reay’s role as ethnographer, and her explorations as writer of this material on gender relations, will allow us to ask questions important to evaluating both anthropological and feminist literatures: In what ways may this have been a signal feminist work, and in what ways is it not quite apt to see it as such?

This Editor’s Introduction will first tell the story of how this manuscript came to be found. Some detail will be provided for the reader on matters of content and editing that had to be taken into account in order to bring the manuscript to publication. It will then evaluate the work’s place in the anthropological literature on Highlands Papua New Guinea, and feminist concerns in that literature. That exploration will include commentary on the work of Marie Reay as female anthropologist in a particular academic time and place, a writer, and a person who, in her academic and personal life, felt herself to be outside the ordinary.

Finding the book in the Reay Collection

We anthropologists at The Australian National University were to hold a conference, ‘Anthropology’s futures: looking forward from 60 Years of Anthropology at The Australian National University’, in September 2011. A couple of months before that, I was rummaging through many boxes of the papers and effects of Marie Olive Reay in the basement of the Menzies Library at the university. This was part of a wider effort—initiated by Professor Kathryn Robinson—on the part of several of us at The Australian National University to find materials of interest from the files of our senior, mostly departed, colleagues, in order to assemble an historical display for the conference that would tell a story of 60 years of anthropology here.

For those unfamiliar with her, a brief introduction to Marie Reay is in order. Reay was an anthropologist whose ethnographic field sites were Australia and Highlands New Guinea. She conducted her first field research with Aboriginal communities in western New South Wales (Walgett, Bourke, Moree, Coonabarabran and others) in the 1940s, obtaining her first post-graduate degree
for this from Sydney University in 1948. Later, in the early 1960s, she extended her fieldwork with Indigenous communities to Borroloola in the Northern Territory. In the meantime, from 1953, Reay became a doctoral student directed by first departmental chair, Africanist S.F. Nadel, and supervised by Australianist anthropologist and public intellectual W.E.H. Stanner, in what was then called the Department of Anthropology and Sociology in the Research School of Pacific Studies at The Australian National University. She began field research in the Wahgi Valley in the Western Highlands of Papua New Guinea, with people she then referred to as Kuma. She completed her dissertation in 1957, and published it as a book in 1959: *The Kuma: Freedom and Conformity in the New Guinea Highlands*. She subsequently also researched and wrote extensively on elections, religion, political and social change in Papua New Guinea.

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**Photograph 2: Marie Reay with colleagues from The Australian National University, 1955**

(Top row left to right: Dr Peter Lawrence (Research Fellow), Mr C.A. Valentine (Fulbright Scholar), Dr Derek Freeman (Senior Fellow), Dr Adrian Mayer (Research Fellow), Mr Ron Penny (Research Fellow), Dr Walter Svoboda (Scholar) [note referred to as Dr Svoboda in annual report even though also a PhD candidate at the time]; Bottom row left to right: Miss Helen Woodger (Secretary), Dr W.E.H. Stanner (Reader), Mrs Fancy Lawrence (Departmental Assistant), Professor Fred Nadel (Head of Department), Miss Marie Reay (Scholar))

Source: Album 2 Reay 440/1194, Noel Butlin Archives
Reay was employed in the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies at The Australian National University from 1959 to 1988, when she retired. She continued to do research and write for some years; she died in 2004. Anthropologist and colleague Michael Young wrote in an obituary (reproduced as Appendix E) that she was ‘the first ethnographer to investigate in depth the position of women in a Highlands society’ (2005:83). Over the course of her career she edited an influential collection on Aboriginal topics including social change (Reay 1964a), and published many articles. Marie also wrote non-academic prose and poetry, and maintained active correspondence with literary societies and writers and with her academic colleagues. She published her book on the Kuma early in her career, as well as numerous articles relating to New Guinea throughout it. But examination of her papers revealed considerable research material on New Guinea topics that had not yet been shaped into manuscript form (for example, major collections of myths, and of Wahgi shield designs); and much material that existed in manuscript form, but remained unpublished, including several articles, and the present work.

At the time that I began examining the Reay material, archivists at the Menzies Library, Margaret Shapley and the late Karina Taylor, were in the process of its documentation. Marie Reay had appointed her long-term friend and employee of the Department of Anthropology, Judith Wilson, as her executor. Though Wilson had initially thought she would be able to undertake curation of the collection upon Reay’s death in 2004, a flood in 2007 damaged some of the files, and led her to think they would be safer if deposited in an institutional setting. She turned over the materials to the archive in the Menzies Library. When I began to search through them, it became obvious to me that the collection contained previously unknown manuscripts and required work beyond ordinary archiving to assemble them. I began sorting chapter versions of this book, and made an application to Wenner-Gren’s Historical Archives Program to advance the work. The latter made it possible to employ an anthropologist to assist in putting together the various versions of papers and manuscripts and clarifying their status. The extensive collection has now been documented, archived and furnished with a Finder List (see Australian National University Archives: ANUA 440. 2013. Marie Reay collection (item list)).

As this suggests, the rummaging turned out to be unexpectedly productive, in both of Reay’s ethnographic fields. Going through box after box of Reay’s Australianist materials from her 1940s fieldwork in northern New South Wales, I found copious fieldnotes of documentary interest from Walgett, Bourke, Moree, Brewarrina, Collarenebri, Mungindi, Boggabilla, Coonamble, Coonabarabran

1 A vailable at http://archivescollection.anu.edu.au/index.php/marie-reay-collection. Note quotations that follow from these files all have the form 440- (Reay files) followed by item number.
and Gulargambone, which still await, and would reward, detailed study. A copy of Reay’s long-lost Sydney University Master’s thesis of 1947 on kinship and communities in northern New South Wales came to light.

The many boxes of material from her long-term fieldwork in Papua New Guinea spanned a period from 1953 into the 1980s. During these years Reay made numerous fieldtrips to the Wahgi Valley (now within a newly configured province called Jiwaka, established in 2012). She was there so often that a contemporary and colleague, Jeremy Beckett, playfully called her ‘Our Lady of Perpetual Fieldwork’.

In addition to a number of unpublished research papers and materials on New Guinea topics, from those boxes there also began to emerge various, numbered copies of chapters which were apparently parts of a book manuscript. Different versions of the book’s chapter outline came to light. There was an early version with eight chapters, and later versions with fourteen, which guided the reconstruction of the scattered chapters, in all their variant drafts. Eventually enough chapters turned up so that it became clear it would be possible to reconstruct the book which you have before you.

The present manuscript thus represents a second book on Reay’s original field site which she had nearly completed, in all likelihood by the mid-1960s, but—for reasons not directly stated in any of her notes—she never published. This publication therefore represents a large addition to Reay’s known work, and is significant in several other ways on which there is further comment below.

**Dating the manuscript**

From Reay’s fieldnotes, it is clear that she had a great deal to do with some of the major personalities in this book from the period of her first doctoral fieldwork 1953-55. Some letters and notes indicate that, while she had thought about and probably composed large sections of the book in the intervening ten years, on return to the area in 1963 she considered that the book was not ready for publication, and needed revision. She wrote a letter to this effect to administrator ‘Pat’ in Canberra on 30th March 1964.2

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2 Pat O’Connor was originally appointed as Field Manager, New Guinea School Services [NGSS] which was the admin area that serviced the New Guinea Research Unit [NGRU]. He reported to the Business Manager of the Research School of Pacific Studies [RSPacS] and the NGSS was part of the Business Manager’s domain. After Independence The Australian National University handed it over to Papua New Guinea and it became the Papua New Guinea Institute of Applied Social and Economic Research [IASER] and a local person was appointed as manager. Pat O’Connor came to the School, as Assistant to the Business Manager (of RSPacS and the Research School of Social Science [RSSS]) and then later he became Assistant Business Manager.
We shall have to scrap plans for early publication of my book on the women here. The new material I have for it warrants a Part II (Ten Years Later), and it needs to be written up more carefully than I could hope to do in a hasty revision.

The addition of new materials evidently accounts for the large number of chapter outlines which were found in the Reay collection. She seems to have added approximately six chapters in the later period of the 1960s (and perhaps also re-worked earlier chapters).

The material as it was deposited and stored at the Menzies Library revealed no clear chronological ordering of chapter versions, or systematic filing of them by date. At least, by the time the materials were being searched and archived in 2011 there was no such definitive dating and ordering. Different versions of the same chapter were found in different boxes, and most boxes contained a diversity of materials (other papers, chapters of this book and another multi-chapter work in progress, and so on). Most of the chapters were typed and carbon copied; there were slightly different versions of a number of them. By going through them it was possible in many instances to definitively determine which version was the latest. This is because some typed chapter versions have corrections written on them in Reay’s minute hand, and these corrections had been incorporated into later versions of the typescript.

A few of the chapter drafts or sections were dated; most were not. For instance, a section of what eventually was to become part of Chapter 8 (Laik Bilong Man) entitled ‘The Marriage of Buda and Gibbis’ is dated 19/3/64; another section of the same chapter entitled ‘The Marriage of Nere and Walump’, 26/3/64. That these are so close together suggests that Reay was pulling together a ‘current version’ at that time. Those titles also seem to indicate that a change Reay made over some time, converting Wahgi names to English names of characters, was not complete by that date. In a few places, dates or times of events are mentioned in chapter versions (e.g., ‘In October 1963 Konangil and his wife were talking together’—Konangil a person who considered Marie his ‘sister’, and whom she had known from her first fieldwork in 1953). The 14-chapter version presented here is, naturally, that which is the most complete and latest that could be assembled.

In conclusion, as of 1964, Reay decided that more revision was required, perhaps to account for change, in general or in the circumstances of particular persons, over the period of ten years or so in which she seems to have worked on this manuscript. It remains unclear exactly what changes she might have thought of making; and even whether the difference between shorter (8-chapter) and longer (14-chapter) versions may have represented most of the changes she wanted to make. Her expressed sense of the need for revision is apparently part
of the reason that she did not proceed to publish this work. But it was probably not the only one. It appears that she did not return to concerted work on the manuscript in the productive working years she had between the mid-1960s and her retirement.

**Naming the people and titling the manuscript**

In her original book (1959) Marie called the people she worked with ‘Kuma’. She began, however, by stating that the people ‘have no name for themselves’ (Reay (1959:1), as is indeed common in the region. People recognize the Wahgi River (see Map 1) as a boundary between those generally known as Danga (after the name of the largest grouping on the north side), and others living south of it known as Kuma (a colloquial contraction of Konumbuga, the name of the largest group on this side of the river). Both Danga and Kuma are part of a large regional grouping called Nangamp by their neighbours. These broad gentilics derive principally from the usage of others, outsiders; while segmentary groups are named.

**Map 1: The Wahgi Valley and its location in Papua New Guinea, showing (most) place names mentioned in the text**

Source: CartoGIS, The Australian National University, CAP 14-130JS

People in the South Wahgi area tend to be identified either by this general, regionally-based label, as Kuma (followed by a ‘clan’-level name and perhaps
a place where the group is located, e.g., Kuma-Kurupka of Kudjip); or by another similar term, as Damnge (followed by a clan-level name, e.g. Damnge-Kangilka). Marie worked with people around Olubus village (near Kondambi), an area in which the designation ‘Kuma’ was current, but was never the sole kind of identifier. In this later book she changed the general designation from Kuma to Minj Agamp, or ‘people of Minj’, a major town in the region and its administrative centre then.

From a brief passage in the Introduction, it seems that Marie understood Agamp as akl- ‘east’ plus amp ‘woman’. This, however, is a false etymology, perhaps based on her incorrect identification of the stop consonant in this word. The word she has adopted here, one which means ‘people’ in Minj and close dialects, is clearly akamp, and does not contain a velar lateral such as occurs in the word akl ‘east’. [Akamp] is not, however, the only word commonly used in these dialects to mean ‘people’. As in most closely related dialects and languages, yiamb also means ‘people’, and is easily seen to consist of Yi=man + amb=woman ‘men and women’. Akamb designates a large group of people, including men, women and children. Akamp is commonly combined with a place-name, so that one may speak of Banz akamp ‘people of Banz’, or Minj Akamp, Nondugl Akamp, and so on. (Reay tended to use the spelling agamp, and I follow her in this in most contexts; but agamp=akamp.)

Titles found in her notes that Reay listed and seems to have considered at various times for this book include:

Women of the Wahgi: Sketches of a Male-Dominated Society

Women of the Waghi (‘good but not informative’, seemingly a comment by Reay’s colleague Ian Hogbin of Sydney University)

Wanderers in the Clouded Hills (‘very pleasing but a little misleading; not all the women are wanderers’, seemingly Reay’s thought)

Women of the Clouded Hills (‘better’, Reay’s comment?)

Wandering Women

Wantons and Wayfarers

Women of the Kuma

Love Among the Kuma

Savage Passion

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3 I ascertained this by interviewing a Middle Wahgi speaker in 2013.
Dissent in Paradise

Sisters of Savages

Women Without Plumes

Women of the Wahgi Valley

The main title chosen for this volume contains elements that Reay seems to have preferred most consistently, and the W- alliteration she trialled in a variety of possible titles.

Her notes include a list of the persons who appear in the book, with their original names and then English versions of names, often quite florid translations of their original names, she had decided to use. There is also a key identifying the clan and other particulars of the characters in the book, which would make it possible to trace them and their descendants. That key has not been included in this edition.

Colleagues’ knowledge of the manuscript

Some of Marie’s near-contemporaries and academic colleagues, when asked, said they have vague recollections of Marie working on or mentioning a manuscript about women’s life in the Wahgi Valley—but none of them recollects having seen it. The person to whom Marie clearly sent some version of the manuscript was Ian Hogbin, a senior anthropological colleague at Sydney University who had conducted fieldwork in the Solomon Islands and in Papua New Guinea (Beckett 1989). It is not clear what version of the manuscript he read, but he sent Reay two pages of comments, to which she responded. At that time the manuscript was titled Waburamp (Tok Pisin waxra ‘prostitute’ and wamp ‘woman’, ‘Loose Women’). In addition to small corrections, he made the following suggestions: he found the title ‘meaningless’ to an audience, and suggested instead ‘Wandering Women’ of the New Guinea Highlands’ or ‘Rebellious Women in a Male-Dominated Society of New Guinea’. He felt the book should be preceded by a brief summary of Kuma social structure, focusing on marriage arrangements, preferences, prohibitions, payments, and relations with affines. He recommended a Dramatis Personae ‘as in most of the longer Russian novels’. As things stood he said it was impossible to ‘remember which person is which when they all have unfamiliar names’. (This may in fact have been what spurred Reay to translate all the names into English, to increase their recognizability.) Each chapter, Hogbin suggested, should be preceded by an introductory paragraph indicating the
nature of the incidents to follow, and should also have a brief, final summarizing paragraph. The existing chapter headings, e.g., ‘Lothario gains a bride’ were, he felt, insufficiently indicative.

Map 2: North and South Wahgi Census Divisions, showing tribal areas (courtesy of John Burton (1988) and deposited in http://library.anu.edu.au/record=b1780420 (North Wahgi Census Division) http://library.anu.edu.au/record=b1780440 (South Wahgi Census Division)

Note: Groups in bold are referred to in the text.

Source: CartoGIS, The Australian National University, CAP 14-142JS

In a letter of response (also undated), Reay thanked him. She noted that titles like *Mambu* (the main title of a recent book by Kenelm Burridge, 1995[1960], subtitled *A Melanesian Millennium*) would also have to be called ‘meaningless’, but she found them intriguing. However, she noted she would be happy to call
the book Wandering Women. She agreed on the matter of Dramatis Personae, and on the need for what she called a ‘potted structural account’ of marriage arrangements and related matters; and proposed that the polar stereotypes of ‘good woman’ and ‘wanderer’, which emerge as significant in the text, needed setting out at the beginning. If that were to be there, she was not so certain that each chapter would need a formal conclusion. She also responded to a number of other points concerning important phrases in the book: she was obviously concerned about the intelligibility of certain phrases common in Tok Pisin, such as karim leg, ‘courting ceremony’, for instance. Her letter to Hogbin concluded with a paragraph that does not seem to have ever made it into the manuscript, except perhaps in the form of one chapter that is incomplete (see further comment below on Chapter 7 which was to be titled Meri Tultul.

Following up on some of Hogbin’s useful suggestions, this edition is accompanied by Map 1 showing main locations of Reay’s field area; Map 2 which shows tribes that she mentions; and a few notes on marriage relations, below; as well as indicative photographs from her collection. (It is not clear which photographs she may have intended to use, so these have been selected to illustrate some main topics in the text.)

Women’s structural position: Reay’s and other views

Michael Young’s remark cited above, that Reay was the first ethnographer to investigate women’s life in Highlands society in depth, was made on the basis of work known at the time of her death in 2004. The present book manuscript, unknown then, represents her most concentrated ethnography in this area. Indeed, it now appears to have been the first full monograph on women’s life in the Papua New Guinea Highlands. A stream of publications on women’s lives and situation began in 1972 with Marilyn Strathern’s Women In Between, based on ethnography of the nearby Mt. Hagen region, ushering in a productive era of ethnography and gender theorization. Reay’s depiction of women’s situation in the Wahgi valley, and the themes in this book of ‘wandering’ and barely repressed rebelliousness under the strictures of marriage and marriage arrangement, directly and interestingly compare with ethnographies from parts of the Highlands, including older ones like Strathern’s based on materials gathered much closer to the time of Reay’s own fieldwork, and some written recently, several decades later.

Strathern’s sense of issue regarding Hagen women, a view which became widely read, was expressed in her title Women in Between. Hagen, like the Wahgi Valley, is normatively patrivirilocal: women move on marriage to their
husband’s location, which is usually that of his father. Women are ‘between’ their families and groups of origin, and those of their husband. While strong ties to their places of origin are assumed of Hagen women, they are also always on their mettle to demonstrate their loyalty to their husband’s place and kin. Each territorialized haus man or lineage into which a woman will marry also belongs to intermediate segmentary groups, and to a wider tribe and (in this region) tribe-pair. Women’s marriages serve as the ‘roads’ of exchange relations between affines (people related through marriage), and also between the wider units to which the bride’s and husband’s lineage belong. At the time Strathern wrote, women as wives were among those people most likely to be suspected of incomplete integration into the group with which they were living, and of questionable loyalty. For this reason Strathern devotes considerable discussion to poisoning accusations frequently levelled against them: women are the archetypal suspects. Women accumulate insider status in the husband’s home area over years, and through producing children and food for their marital households. These accomplishments are sources of their own senses of achievement and well-being, and through them, they ‘come inside’ and belong within the husband’s locale.

Balancing a certain marginality of Hagen women as wives is a strong appreciation of the relationships between affines and groups that their marriages instantiate; and the according of recognition to women as persons within this framework. Thus, while marriages are arranged, and strongly haggled over between husband’s and wife’s kin, the intended bride is asked whether she will ‘go’ in marriage: she is given this initial say. Her sense of commitment is important, as kin on both sides realize, and as Strathern observed. As she describes it, a woman’s sense of worth is strongly linked to her appreciation of a sufficiency of bridewealth having been given by the groom’s kindred for her. The overall dynamics of marriage negotiation and realization seem different in some respects from those described by Reay for the Wahgi and exemplified from real-life examples in this book.

One of the apparent differences, which figures largely in the present manuscript, is the emphasis in the Wahgi material on courtship rituals, and the freedom which young girls had to choose courting partners. Courtship then, as Reay described it, consisted in young girls and their chosen partners engaging in karim leg (literally, ‘carrying leg’). Girl and partner sit with legs extended, hers locked between his, so they can talk and nestle together in close contact—but supposedly not go too far, as karim leg was not simply a matter of private flirtation but also a public spectacle, visible to others, all aware of whom a girl had chosen. Older, including married, men preened themselves and were
flattered to be chosen as courting partners. Reay’s photo collection also shows couples engaging in *tanim het*, in which couples sit close, turning their heads and pressing noses and faces together.

Photograph 3: *Karim leg (carrying leg) I—Kuma 1959*

Source: Album 6 Reay 440/1198, Noel Butlin Archives
Of course, here as elsewhere in the Central Highlands, men might aspire to have more than one wife. For a young unmarried girl, courting demonstrated her capacity to choose, to be valued, and to confirm the desirability of the men they chose. There was more to it than that: girls could choose, but were also regularly dispatched by their families to engage in courting. They were to be returned home ‘bathed’ in pig oil and decorated with feathers, ornaments and valuables for the girl’s family, not for her alone. But still, there was a strong element of choice, flirtation and the girl’s desire to captivate a particular partner. For that reason, courtship as depicted by Reay was also an activity that could provoke jealousy, fights between women over men, and between men and women in other combinations—with wifely jealousy a common inflammatory issue. It could be a source of contention if choices were thwarted, denied, interfered with, as well as realized.
Main aspects of courtship that Reay emphasizes are the passions involved, the contention it can cause, and very importantly also, its abrupt termination and the end of any kind of free choice for girls. Once married, girls were no longer to flirt or court. Men, of course, might continue to do so. Chapters in this book illustrate some of the resulting situations.

Girls’ freedom is transformed into constraint. They must then, as wives, cope with men’s continuing drive to marry other wives, and to continue to be seen as attractive. Women are not to make themselves attractive to other men. Husbands and other relatives readily mete out violence to women not considered to be toeing the line. Men regularly coerce and force their wives. There are many
episodes recorded from life here in which husbands capture their ‘wayward’ wives, lock them into the house, subjugate them with sexual and other physical violence, exercise male dominance and privilege. But wives resist, display physical courage, readiness to defend themselves as well as to attack and to fight with men—and also display anger and resignation on occasions when they can do no more.

Photograph 6: Girl bathed in pig grease

Source: Album 6 Reay 440/1198, Noel Butlin Archives
Reay’s view of women’s position differs from Strathern’s. In her thesis and book (Reay 1959), Reay recognized that women are identified in terms of the clan of their father and, after marriage, that of their husband. But in a wide sense, she took the view that ‘the association of women with particular clans can in no case be characterized as fully effective “membership”’ (Reay 1959:44). By this she meant that women did not have the ability to exercise the rights and obligations of clan membership as men do. It would be more apt, she suggested, to regard women themselves as transferrable ‘property’ of the clans with which they are identified, as ‘assets’ the clans ‘possess’ rather than constituent members of them (Reay 1959:45).

She identified principles of clanship and equivalent exchange as importantly constitutive at many levels among the Minj Agamp, describing the levels of segmentary structure (Reay 1959:25-56), and the overall strong association of a given ‘parish’, or residential location, with a particular clan, and in terms of a strongly agnatic ideology (i.e., one which presumes continuing relatedness in the male line, despite the actual presence of numbers of non-agnates, and the vagueness of actual genealogical connections at many levels). Equivalent exchange refers to a strongly held ideology that a woman should be returned for a woman received in marriage, sometimes in the form of ‘sister exchange’, but also on the basis of other arrangements. Reay found insistence on equivalent gain to balance loss to be a general societal principle, operative both in marriage arrangements and in other forms of exchange.

Reay expressed a sense of the structural centrality of the disposition of women in marriage for the social order. In a draft proposal for another book on the place of women among the Minj Agamp which Marie evidently intended to write (see also further), but in a style rather different from the present one, she wrote:

> At present it is proposed to advance the hypothesis that what appears to be a serious discontinuity in the socialization of the women is explicable in terms of the value placed upon the enjoyment of sexual relations between men and unmarried girls, and [that] this discontinuity is normally prevented from having permanently disruptive effects on female personality and on society by the integrative operation of another major value, that of exact equivalence, through the economic arrangements associated with marriage.

Indeed, Reay’s conclusions in the present volume are more consistent with the thinking revealed in the draft outline we have just examined, than they are an interpretive examination of the lively ethnographic material it presents.

Clearly, Reay had the view that there were profound tensions in this Highlands social order, but that there was at least partial structural balancing of them. Her book *The Kuma* (Reay 1959) had described these tensions, and their
association with (especially, but not only) female suicide, and the un-doing of social arrangements which occurred as a cargo cult swept through the area at the time of early European presence—occasioning, for example, breaching of the strictures of clan exogamy and other bounds of conformity. One of her continuing concerns, however, was not simply with the management of structural tensions, but with the freedom of persons, particularly women who appeared to her so coerced, confined and punished. She concludes the present volume by suggesting that if Wahgi marriage depended on the consent of both parties, women could no longer be exchanged to satisfy obligations between men and groups. If Papua New Guineans attain liberty and equality such that women may choose whom they marry, and even if they marry—and Reay regards this as the granting of a fundamental human right—this will involve ‘not merely the dispersal of ignorance and ill will but also the dissolution of Kuma society’ in its dependence upon exchanges of women, pigs and wealth. Reay’s ethnographic work was thus closely attentive to what she saw as patent inequalities in the Kuma form of life, and a related question of freedom, especially, but not only, for women in this society.

Overall, Reay harboured a view of women in the Wahgi as subject to regular disparagement and male violence. Pacific anthropologist Martha Macintyre held many conversations with Reay while at The Australian National University in the 1980s. From these conversations she concluded that Reay saw male-female relations, especially in regard to sex and work, as fraught with tension and violence. Reay narrated the following fieldwork episode to Macintyre as having been formative of her attitudes: Reay was walking on a path and came across a group of young Kuma men standing around a woman in labour. The young men were laughing and ridiculing the woman by imitating her screams. The baby’s feet had emerged and the woman was in agony. Marie asked them to help carry her back to the village. They refused on the grounds that the woman was polluting in that state. Marie ran and got two women to help her, but the woman and the baby died. Reay was the first anthropologist that Macintyre heard talk about the extent and regularity of violence towards women.

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4 Reay had earlier conducted research in Australia at the Cootamundra Girls’ Home for indigenous girls under direction from A.P. Elkin. From this research, too, Reay had taken away a view of restraint and oppression exacting a particular toll on indigenous girls and women in the Australian context.

5 Reay (1964b) reviewed Ronald M. Berndt’s book *Excess and Restraint: Social Control among a New Guinea Mountain People* (1962), finding that, in its emphases on violence, sex and repression, it was ‘stimulating and controversial’; but, she also implied, somewhat unbelievable in certain respects which, she thought, might reflect male fantasy. To students she recommended reading the book; to Berndt, more fieldwork that might add up to a more fully-researched and contemporary view.

6 Macintyre was a PhD student enrolled at The Australian National University from 1979-83, and was involved in a departmental working group on gender in 1983-84, also keeping up contacts with the Department and Reay thereafter. A working group on Language in Cultural Context was convened in the department in the years 1980-82. A following one on Gender Relations in the Southwestern Pacific in 1983-85, in which Macintyre participated, was organized and convened by Roger Keesing, Michael Young, and Marie Reay. In 1986 Martha Macintyre held three long interviews with Marie Reay about her life and career, one of which she recorded. I thank her for reading and commenting on this Introduction, and for her permission to cite this anecdote and her sense of Reay’s views.
Photograph 7: Wahgi married woman

Source: Album 6 Reay 440/1198, Noel Butlin Archives
Photograph 8: Koma held by a male relative while being rebuked for running away to evade marriage, c. 1953-59

Source: Album 6 Reay 440/1198, Noel Butlin Archives
These emphases lead me to connect Reay’s portrayal of Highlands life, both in her 1959 book and in this one, with the (early) work of Lisette Josephides (1975), the more recent work of Holly Wardlow (2006), and on-going research and writing on gender relations, domestic and gendered violence, and their association with HIV Aids (Hammar 2010, Jolly, Stewart and Brewer 2012) under the recent, and increasingly mobile, conditions of life in Papua New Guinea.

Josephides (1975) focused her analysis of Kewa (Southern Highlands), ostensibly a society with no hereditary offices and no formalized inequalities among men, upon the ‘production’ of inequality through male control of women’s labour. Like Reay, Josephides saw Kewa attributes of the ‘group’ as those associated with maleness, with women having no place in male descriptions of group identity. She identified transaction as the male political activity par excellence, and the female role as a dependent one, despite its centrality in production and reproduction.

Perhaps most astonishing are the close affinities between Reay’s distinction between ‘wives’ and ‘wanderers’, and Wardlow’s (2006) characterization of the clearer emergence and definition in the last couple of decades of a category of ‘wayward women’ among the Huli. Wardlow’s is an account of women who, with recent mining activity and greater mobility, become ‘passenger women’, accepting money for sex. The present manuscript gives us another comparator case of women’s chafing against constraints from an earlier period and another part of the Highlands. I would argue the comparison suggests the structural potential in-built within a range of Highlands societies for women who conform to expectations to be regarded as wifely, and women who do not, to have little room to move, and to be categorized by kin and others as the ‘wanderers’, the (sexually and otherwise) wayward women, of Reay’s (and Wardlow’s) accounts.

How did Reay think about change with respect to these topics that most concerned her? In this manuscript she clearly expresses the view that Australian administrative presence had changed things, in the direction of reducing violence meted out to women, and making Wahgi men aware of risks they would run of being thrown in jail if they treated women as brutally as they might otherwise have done. By the time of Reay’s fieldwork colonial government stations, courts and jails had been established, and these and administrative attitudes and process served to deter some male violence. Reay depicts people in the Wahgi, both men and women, as realizing that the Australian administration required them to consider laik bilong meri ‘what a woman wants’, as a relevant (and probably new) category; as well as laik bilong man ‘what a man wants’. The common novel element in these phrases is expression of an individual’s will

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7 According to Martha Macintyre, Reay thought that some cases of alleged Kuma female suicide were disguised homicides.
and choice. Notwithstanding any deterrent effect of administrative presence, the depiction of what we now call gender-based violence is stark in this book. Today, this is more a concern here and in other parts of the Highlands than ever before. There is greater awareness in Papua New Guinea and on the part of outside observers how high are levels of domestic and other gender-based violence. One may even conclude that some aspects of ongoing social change both contribute to, and militate against, these high levels. Christian religiosity has burgeoned, and Christian sectarianism has become more diverse, throughout the Highlands. Residential change has been such that husbands and wives now mostly live together (whereas formerly they lived in separate houses in this and many other regions, separateness typically bolstered by ideas and practices of female pollution). Alcohol has become much more accessible, as have guns. Access to money is increasingly important, and social relations are increasingly monetized, in most places, even as obvious inequalities in wealth also increase. Yet in Jiwaka in particular (as the province in which Reay researched is now called), there is now a number of strong female political leaders, and there is greater access for girls and women to education and jobs.

Reay did not live to see any of these things in their current form. Yet she was alert to the question of women’s gaining position and power—clearly something extraordinary in her day. She titled one of the proposed chapters of this book Meri Tultul, and was fascinated to try to find out how a woman of Kudjip she had heard of had come to be an administrative official. (See Chapter 7 in which the one paragraph she seems to have written about this topic is reproduced.) Unfortunately she was never able to pursue the investigation at Kudjip.

This manuscript would have been the first full-length ethnography of women’s lives had it appeared; and in its exploration of the contradiction Reay saw between early freedom and subsequent marital constraint for women connects directly with current emphases on gender, violence and social change. Its publication now provides an unexpected window onto gender relations, and gender-based violence, in an earlier period. As a background piece it can stimulate attempts to understand what has remained the same, and what has changed and inflected gender relations in new ways.

**Experimental ethnographic writing**

A second landmark quality of this manuscript is the experiment it represented in ethnographic writing, for Reay personally as well as in terms of dominant contemporary standards. Two modes are manifest over a long period in Reay’s writing on Wahgi women. The first is grounded in certain social structural and psychic problems she saw as inherent in the courting, marriage and related gendered and gendering practices of the Wahgi Agamp, and expressed in
conventional, academic descriptive and analytical terms. The second, which she trialled in this book, is closely ethnographic and seemingly very much grounded in the verbal as well as other forms of social action concerning women that she observed. It is lively and dramaturgical. The reader has the impression of experiencing the unfolding of events. Reay seems to have given fairly separate expression to these two modes in her published as well as unpublished work, and not woven ethnography and explicit theory into the same pieces of writing in a more integrated way.

Let us take some examples of the first, more usual, academic style. This style characterizes her first book on the Kuma (1959), and some later work on women’s life too. In 1966, about the time she may have finished the current version of *Wives and Wanderers*, Reay published a paper called ‘Women in Transitional Society’. A chapter in a volume called *New Guinea on the Threshold* (independence came in 1975), Reay’s paper underscored the extent to which Papua New Guinea was ‘originally a man’s world’, and described women’s ‘anomalous place in a set of social, economic, and ceremonial transactions carried out by men, namely the payments connected with marriage’ (1966:166). Reay considered the conflicting values involved in bridewealth (complicated by Australian officials construing marriage as a relation between the partners, and failing to understand its group-connecting dimensions). She described new kinds of roles and training becoming available to women (as nurses, teachers, in social welfare work, as well as in volunteer religious and training associations); and with expected change, predicted a strong role for women as culture carriers, ‘transmitting awareness of the past’ (1966:184) as part of the adjustment of Papua New Guineans to changing conditions. She also mentions the need, given the favouring by formal and informal courts of the principle of *laik bilong meri*, for recognition of a complementary principle, *laik bilong man* (‘what a man wants’), which would allow younger men to defer marriage in the interests of their further education or for other such reasons.

Reay’s documents include an (undated) draft outline of what was no doubt intended to be a book-length manuscript titled ‘The Socialization of Women in Relation to the Institution of Marriage and the Value System of Wahgi Society’ (440-383). The draft outline of the work consists of thirty chapters. Coverage of women’s life was evidently intended to be comprehensively related to all major domains of Wahgi life, illuminating social structure and psychic life. Chapters were: Social Grouping; Patterns of Work and Ownership; Kinship; Authority Structure; Sorcery and Witchcraft; Warfare; Food Exchanges; Ceremonial; Aesthetic Expression; Economic Roles; Kinship Roles; Roles in Ceremony; Stages in the Life Cycle; Breast Feeding; Sphincter Control; Explicit Controls During Childhood; Initiation; Sexual Behaviour During Childhood and Adolescence; Adoption; Spirits and Nonda (Mushroom, Toadstool—Reay wrote extensively
about the hallucinogenic use of mushrooms); Mediums; Witches; Amp Wabure (Loose Women); Exchange of Women; Betrothal; The Event of Marriage; Marriage Payments; Divorce; The Widow; The Remarried Woman.

More revealing are the brief statements of problem and conclusion that accompany the draft outline. Reay summarised the book’s problem as follows:

Marriage in Wahgi society presents special problems of adjustment for the woman, because by the time she is given in marriage the process of socialization is rarely complete. The event of marriage is generally a violent, almost traumatic experience for the bride in this society and, although she is already aware that this kind of marriage does take place, it is contrary to her own expectations. It will be demonstrated that, viewed within the life cycle of the woman, the event of marriage is a fully institutionalized rite de passage which is itself a part of the socialization process, if ‘socialization’ can be defined as the structuring of the mature social ego. An attempt will be made to explain, in terms of the value system of Wahgi society, what appears to be a radical discontinuity in the socialization of women, this sudden negation at marriage of expectations which are thoroughly consistent with the modus vivendi of the unmarried girl. I shall try to relate this to the equally startling reversal at marriage of the male’s essentially passive role in sexual relationships.

Much of this is also the content of the present volume. But this manuscript is written in a lively, theatrical style. This was obviously an experiment with a new genre for Reay, compared with her other academic work including the published Kuma book, and the above planned volume. The statement of the tensions she saw for women—radical discontinuity, the negation of freedom and expectations—are the same. But the presentation is very different. The present work is most directly grounded in her ethnographic observation, and foregrounds personalities, their actions and struggles with each other. The larger structural issues are present but backgrounded, emerging in particular sections and especially in conclusion, where Reay also does not hesitate to be both moralizing and predictive. The projective psychological testing that her notes and documents reveal her to have practiced (see Reay 1959:95 for indications that this was encouraged by S.F. Nadel) is not mentioned explicitly in this book, but was a method associated with Reay’s interest in personal equilibrium and disequilibrium. She makes it clear that, when they are disciplined, constrained and even violently assaulted, women show themselves to be persons full of will and fight (and thus in no way does she present them as victims). Yet the vivid ethnography shows the extent of their structural disadvantage, and thus operates in the service of theoretical conceptualization (Lutz 1995).
It is important to locate Reay in relation to other stylistic experimentation arising around this time from ethnographic experience, some of it originating from New Guinea, and perhaps known in some form to her (although how much remains unclear). Most notable among such efforts would be Kenneth E. (‘Mick’) Read’s vibrant story of his two years’ field research in the Eastern Highlands, *The High Valley* (1965). Read characterized this work as autobiographical and necessarily personal, but also as an important antidote to the ‘antiseptic’ quality of so much anthropological writing. Indeed, his moving account of the betrothal and marriage of a young girl, Tarova (Read 1965:172-211), is multi-perspectival, grounded in sympathy with the girl herself, also offering great insight into the acts and feelings of men and women involved, and a convinced but tempered sense of the structural inequalities involved in marriage here, especially of such a young girl as Tarova. Doubtless Reay came to know this book, and must have perceived its relation to her own work. Read’s work is, as he noted in several places, deliberately ‘subjective’, and he was indeed very much a subject in his own book, to an extent that Reay is not in the work before us. Her most subjective published statement is found in Reay (1992).

The present book complemented another dimension of Reay’s life, a lasting interest in literature and writing of poetry. Her letters and papers reveal how closely she followed new literary work, especially in Australia, and particularly poetry; and that she entered various poetry and writing competitions. For this book she compiled a dramatis personae of her characters, and gave them all vivid, translated English names, obviously thinking of the stories that comprise these chapters in theatrical terms. Ian Hogbin apparently encouraged her to do this. He seems to have found the style appealing. But it is not clear how other academic readers might have reacted. Although this must remain speculation, it seems possible that Reay hesitated in finalizing this manuscript because of the way she had formulated it: somewhere between an ethnographic account and a literary work. (Strathern, this volume, characterizes this as ‘highly creative non-fiction’.) There were then relatively few companion efforts—many fewer than began to emerge with a more explicit set of alternative styles a decade and more later in the 1980s and 1990s, a large number of them feminist.

It seems telling that, despite having worked on this manuscript for ten years and more, beginning with her earliest fieldwork and incorporating some of its observations, Reay also continued to think in terms of a more academically

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8 Read studied with Ian Hogbin in Sydney. Hogbin and Reay clearly had a friendlier and more trusting collegial relation than she had with many others. She also admired his writing greatly, and they shared a love of literature. Hogbin was homosexual, and Marie lesbian, while Read expressed homosexual interest in relation to a New Guinean companion somewhat more explicitly in a work that followed *The High Valley* (Read 1986:11-12). Read also had a wife, Monica, and a son. His long-term interest in homosexuality was expressed professionally, in fieldwork in a gay bar throughout the 1970s, and in his serving as the first President of the Anthropological Research Group on Homosexuality (later renamed Society for Lesbian and Gay Anthropology).
written account of women’s lives, cited above, ‘The Socialization of Women in Relation to the Institution of Marriage and the Value System of Wahgi Society’. These concerns about style of presentation, and the implications, may have been what caused her to turn away from this project after the mid-1960s. It is also worth noting that another partial book manuscript found in her documents was, like this one, in more experience-near style.

Because Reay explored this more dramaturgical style of writing for a long period of time, it is of interest to examine one of the chapters of the present book to illustrate the relation between the closely observed fieldnotes from which it is drawn, and the final version of the chapter.

From 1954 there are copious fieldnotes concerning a girl named Muru who is a main subject of Chapter 9 of the final manuscript, ‘A Woman of the Kugika’ (for some detail on this clan, see Reay 1959:31). From different periods of note-taking it is clear that Reay kept up with Muru over a period of at least, and probably more than, thirty years—for in one biographical sketch document concerning Muru, which Reay obviously intended for publication, she notes that Muru was a neighbour of hers during a fieldwork period of 1983. By the finalization of Chapter 9, Muru had become ‘Cass’, and her mother, originally Mai, had become ‘Vine’.

The basics of Cass[Muru]’s situation are quickly told in synoptic form, but synopsis is interspersed below with short passages showing how Reay represented the situation in this book. Cass[Muru]’s mother Vine[Mai] was brought home as a widow by a Kugika clansman (originally Tai, later re-named Raggiana), from a bout of warfare in the north of the valley. With her Vine[Mai] brought her small daughter, Cass[Muru], and Raggiana[Tai] raised the child in his household. Vine[Mai] and Raggiana[Tai] later had a son, a brother to Cass[Muru]. When the time came Raggiana[Tai] first gave Cass[Muru] in marriage to a man of Konumbuga Taukanim, a ‘brother’ clan (for some detail on Konumbuga, ibid).

In Chapter 9 of this book, Reay expands on what this situation represented for Cass[Muru] according to commonplace Kuma norms, emphasizing Cass[Muru]’s feelings concerning her marriage, and then upon her husband’s death:

… Raggiana [Cass[Muru]’s stepfather] gave Cass to the Konumbuga Taukanim in exchange for one of them [for another woman]. … But Cass’s husband died before she had become reconciled to being married to him, and some of the Taukanim wives … resented her presence among them. She pleaded with her stepfather to take her back instead of leaving her to be appropriated by another Taukanim man …

After her husband’s death, Cass[Muru]’s stepfather instead gave her to a man, Bird[Kai], of his own clan, Kugika Koimamkup. This was of course considered
acceptable because Cass[Muru] was adopted and not originally of Kugika. Reay makes it clear, though, that Cass[Muru] ‘did not go willingly’ to this new husband, Bird[Kai]. Cass[Muru] had two children with Bird[Kai]. Both died and the parents wrapped them in burial shrouds and decorated them with valuables. Cass[Muru]’s feelings were evidently violently assaulted when she discovered one day that her husband had come and removed the valuables, presumably for further use.

This situation is graphically reproduced in this book, through her recounting of field experience and conversation. Reay says of Cass[Muru] in this book:

“One day she showed me, at one side of her unused cooking grove, an old house which had once been inhabited but was not beyond repair … “My children”, Cass told me. “We put them in there”…. Cass tore away some of the cobwebs and removed the cross-bars. We could see, just inside, the dim shapes of two bundles wrapped in mouldy bark cloth and lap-lap material, lying side by side. “They just fell sick and died” Cass told me flatly. Then she began to relate, with a sudden surge of anger, something Bird had done.

What Bird[Kai] had done was to strip the children’s bodies of their valuables. Reay goes on in Chapter 9 to articulate the significance of this, especially for the parents, mother and father; and the ‘horror’ Cass[Muru] expressed to her in recounting the pillage.

Cass[Muru]’s relations with Bird[Kai] worsened, and she began to seek support for a separation from him. She found some on the part of her real paternal relatives, who said they regarded her marriage to Bird[Kai] as incomplete because they had never received any portion of bridewealth. Raggiana[Tai]’s own clan, on the other hand, regarded him and not her paternal relatives as perfectly entitled to any such payments because he had brought Cass[Muru] back with her mother and provided for her. Cass[Muru] went to the Government Station to try to get help in separating from her husband, but was at least thought to have become involved with one or more men there, and came to be seen by her own relatives, including her brother, as a ‘wandering woman’, a harlot. She evidently did have an affair with a native policeman from Chimbu, who later on tried to make a case for having the resulting son handed over to him. While all this was going on, Bird[Kai]—her husband—continued to try to get her back by various means, including assaulting her, penning her up in a house, and so on. When Cass[Muru] defended herself and retaliated by alleging in public that he had tried to force her to perform fellatio—regarded as anomalous, crude and degrading—Bird[Kai]’s co-clansmen moved to the view that a decision about the marriage should be left to the Court of Native Affairs, which duly dissolved it in 1955. Many other matters of the marriage—payments, allocation of the
pigs Cass[Muru] tended, and so on—remained unresolved for a long time, as
Bird[Kai] continued to try to force Cass[Muru] to come back despite the Court’s
ruling. Many further relationships in Cass[Muru]’s life—with her mother’s
do-wives as well as her own, her brother, and so on—of course continued in
their complexity beyond the ‘divorce’. Cass[Muru]’s expressed desire to go to
live with the Chimbu policeman was opposed by her brother, who also vetoed
Reay’s offering her any help to travel to him. Ten years after the divorce, by
1964, Cass[Muru]’s brother, who had a daughter but no son of his own, was
acting as father to her son by the Chimbu man and was determined that the son
grow up as a member of Kugika clan.

A life story as complex as this could of course serve to illustrate a great range of
issues. In the conclusion of Chapter 9, Reay extricates herself from the immediacy
of the story and explicitly focuses on issues in a more evaluative way:

Cass’s life would have been different in many details if the Australians
had not come to the Wahgi Valley and established control there during
her lifetime. Her separation from Bird would have been even more
tenuous an arrangement than it was if she had not had the support
of the Court of Native Affairs and of her family’s friends among the
interpreters and native police.

In this context, Reay seems to treat the role of the Court as positive. This
episode illustrates Reay’s conviction that some instability, as well as some
possible benefits for women, had been introduced into marriage relations by
the insistence of kiaps and government that laik bilong meri (what the woman
wants) should be given consideration. In the book there are several mentions
of men’s concerns about dealing with women as they would have formerly done
because of fears of government interference, and the possibility that women
might complain. The story also shows that a woman’s struggle to free herself
from a marriage may quickly lead to her being regarded as a ‘wanderer’, a harlot,
often—as in Cass[Muru]’s case—by some of ‘her’ people, like her brother, who
have an interest in the condition of her marriage. It illustrates, in short, the
structural imbalance characteristic of women’s lives: that a woman’s deviation
from patterns of marriage and behaviour approved by kin and affines caused
their view to oscillate quickly to one of her as a ‘wanderer’.

Reay also mentions another point several times: that despite all provocations
Bird[Kai] offered her, Cass[Muru] never publicly referred to his having stripped
their children’s corpses of the valuables they had placed with them. Cass[Muru]
told Reay that this might have led to Bird[Kai]’s being jailed: it would presumably
have been felt to be even more repellent than her public revelation of sexual
indecency. And, Reay concludes, Cass[Muru] did not refrain from revealing the
theft out of a sense of identification with her husband, but rather because she
identified with Kugika as a result of her adoption and long-term association with the clan into which her mother had married. She was more a ‘woman of the Kugika’ in that sense, than through her own marriage into it, which had been a history of tribulation.

Reay’s field notes (Australian National University Archives: ANUA 440. 2013. Marie Reay collection (item list): 440: 373-001) reveal her recordings of many of the events of Cass[Muru]’s case in real time, for instance:9

24.2.54 Muru[Cass] was walking back from Minj along the Big Road when she met a manki-masta [house boy] from Minj who had followed her. He asked her where she was going and she answered that she was going home. He laughed and said, “You’re going to your lover, not to your house” & dragged her into the bushes & had sex. Int. with her. A police boy saw them and they ran away. Muru went to Kai[Bird] and told him what had happened. Much discussion between Kai and another Koimamkup man & Tagba, who came up while they were talking. Kombuk II [a native medical assistant; Kombuk was also the name of Muru’s brother, hence the II] said that Muru did not call out when the manki-masta grabbed her—Kombuk’s house is close to the place and he wd have heard her. The men concluded that Muru had gone with the manki-masta willingly & had only told Kai about it because the police man had seen what had happened and might tell Kai anyway. Kai grabbed the lap-lap & scarf Muru wore on her head, & tore her pubic bilum. He tried to tear off her beads but she protected them. Kai said angrily that it was clear that Muru had a lover because whenever she went to Minj she decorated herself with beads & scarf & lap-lap. He argued that if she didn’t have a lover she wdn’t bother decorating herself … etc.

27.10.54 In the afternoon, KAI[Bird] went down to the Minj River to wait for Muru[Cass] to return from Minj. He hid in the pit-pit near the water. Muru came from Minj with TUAN (WAU’s brother) and KOBIA (Konumbuga). KAI tried to throw her in the water, but the Konumbuga men held him off while Muru escaped. KAI took Muru to his women’s house and told her to cook him some food. She refused and tried to run away. They chased, and eventually Muru came to Kondambi [the settlement where Reay was living]. KAI stopped hitting and pulling her when he became aware that a crowd had gathered at Kondambi to watch them. Muru came up to Kondambi near KAI’s house, when Andamung was taking into the house some kumu [ond kumu?] she had mumed [sic;

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9 As do her letters from the field. See Appendix D as an example of a personal letter which illustrates how she conveyed the field events she was observing to friends and household in Canberra.
mumued, cooked in a ground oven]. Rain was coming. KAI called out to Andamung to take Muru’s belongings to his women’s house. Andamung pretended not to hear him. Rain came, and KAI went to his own house.

28.10.54 Last night, Muru slept with KAI’s wife Komdilj and intended to go to Minj today to stay with Kobilj-Kerewa’s wife. Onim asked me whether I had any news of Muru today and wanted to know whether Muru was still all right or whether KAI had killed her.

At many places in Chapter 9 as briefly illustrated above Reay recounts, in conversational form, what happened at times between Bird[Kai] and Cass[Muru]. For example, Cass[Muru] went to visit her brother without her husband’s permission. He beat her on return, and then, as reported in Chapter 9, said something to her which reveals something of the presuppositions he acted on in beating his wife, and threatening to kill her brother:

“You can’t go over there again. If you go to see your brothers, they will give you to another man, but you are married to me and I won’t stand for it.”

Reay’s detailed fieldnotes provided the content of the chapter’s narrative. Clearly the events were observed by Reay day by day, and she also recorded what was said about developments, usually attributing the remarks to particular people. Portions of her fieldnotes consist entirely of attributed remarks and conversations, reflecting the importance of conversation, speech-making and represented (or reported) speech in the lives of these Highlanders. Even if we assume that her command of the local language grew with time, it seems likely she would have had considerable assistance from one or more helpers in documenting these events and remarks each day, particularly during the early years of her fieldwork. Marie mentions having had field assistants, and also the regular companionship of younger people, e.g, a young boy (of perhaps 12 or so) upon whom she could depend to run errands.\(^{10}\) It is clear that Cass[Muru] herself contributed in some part to Reay’s language learning, for she writes of her in her notes:

Muru was my ‘sister’, since her stepfather’s brother had ‘adopted’ me as his ‘daughter’ … Muru tried to teach me her language, not by listing things which could be identified, as the other women did, but by patiently making me understand things she wanted to tell me. I

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\(^{10}\) Both Reay and a boy like this were presumably fluent in Tok Pisin, and he could have translated from the local language whatever may have been unclear to her. See Reay 1992:147 on language proficiency and 1992:163 on field assistants.
believe a kind of sympathy grew up between us … (Australian National University Archives: ANUA 440. 2013. Marie Reay collection (item list): 440: 373-001)

So the chapters of this book as they stand largely represent Reay’s narrativization of women’s life stories from her fieldnotes, which were probably constructed in part by assistance Reay got in recording conversations and commentaries, as well as from her own on-going observations. This mode of writing and representation was, as already suggested, clearly experimental in some ways for Reay herself. In its theatricality, its focus upon characters, action, and talk, it clearly differed from the canons of academic writing she had employed in her thesis, and in other work which she continued to produce after she had apparently left this project in limbo. However, she did less with the other proposed, more academically styled, book on Wahgi women.

Reay in context: Colonial, academic, personal

Reay was unusual in having shifted to fieldwork in Papua New Guinea from fieldwork with south-eastern Aboriginal groups, long since pacified in a basic sense, and resident on reserves on the fringes of country towns as marginalized people in Australia. While there were or had been some female ethnographers of Aboriginal Australia (including Ursula McConnell, Grace Sitlington, Ruth Fink Latukefu, Faye Gale, Catherine Berndt, and lone female social workers such as Olive Pink; subsequently, Nancy Munn and Diane Barwick), there were relatively few ethnographers working in Papua New Guinea in Reay’s early research period, and most of the others were men: Peter Lawrence, Mervyn Meggitt (who likewise went from Aboriginal Australia to PhD work in New Guinea), Mick Read, Richard Salisbury, Ralph Bulmer, among others. ¹¹

Exceptions to the dearth of women in Papua New Guinea were path-breaking Hortense Powdermaker, who worked in New Ireland in the 1920s; Camilla Wedgwood, who worked in Manam 1932-34, Phyllis Kaberry, who did fieldwork both in Australia (1934-35) and in the Sepik region of Papua New Guinea (1939-40); and Paula Brown, who did research in roughly the same time period as Reay in Chimbu. The major period of Papua New Guinean ethnography, with a greater diversity of both male and female ethnographers, was yet to come (though the first anthropological pair, Margaret Mead and Reo Fortune, preceded Ronald and Catherine Berndt, who worked in the Eastern Highlands from 1951-53, by about fifteen years; and Marilyn and Andrew Strathern by three decades).

¹¹ During this time, under A.P. Elkin at Sydney, unmarried women were discouraged from going to Papua New Guinea and remote Australia. Elkin preferred them to conduct fieldwork instead in ‘settled’ Australia (J.R. Beckett, pers. com.)
But, crucially, during the period of increasing anthropological research in New Guinea from the 1950s when Reay began her work, Australia made its presence as colonial power felt in many parts of the country, and in the Highlands at least, was met with considerable enthusiasm.

A certain colonial privilege was assumed and enjoyed by most of these ethnographers, men and women. Some, such as Peter Lawrence (whose most famous work remains *Road Belong Cargo*, a study of cargoistic movements on the northern Rai coast of New Guinea), used to tell anecdotes about the period, evoking a picture of the anthropologist’s privilege in summoning ‘natives’ to interview on the verandah (though this was not necessarily all their fieldwork amounted to), and in visiting the Australian plantocracy.\(^\text{12}\) Marie Reay, too, enjoyed some of these privileges. It is clear that she had good access to the District Officer; that she had use of a car and driver; and that she had young male assistants who did her housekeeping, and some who also gathered daily news, reported on court cases and other activities, and also translated for her and helped her transcribe. There was more readily accessible local Australian administrative presence (for instance at Minj), than there has been since.

However, this does not mean that female researchers were treated without prejudice (Reay 1992:142-143). Michael Young (2005:83) notes that the Wahgi ‘god-administrator’ disapproved of female anthropologists, especially those who broke the ‘White Women’s Protection Law by wearing shorts’—which Reay did. ‘Modified Bombay Bloomers’, Reay called them, capacious khaki shorts of which she wrote that they ‘looked terrible’ and would certainly ‘discourage any sexual passion that happened to be present’ (Reay 1992:166). Like female anthropologists elsewhere—Elsie Clews Parsons with her groundbreaking, later-controversial *Pueblo Indian Religion* (1939), for example—Reay was treated by New Guineans as an honorary male in that she was regularly present at otherwise gender-restricted ceremonies and events (see Reay 1992:154 on ‘white woman’s privilege’).

Reay used to refer to her time in Papua New Guinea as ‘meadow work’, making a humorous contrast with the more ordinary anthropologist’s ‘fieldwork’. She obviously enjoyed her time in Papua New Guinea. She was a contemporary of Mervyn Meggitt, D’Arcy Ryan, Ralph Bulmer, Mick Read, Robert Glasse and other anthropologists, and was a person to whom a number of new aspiring fieldworkers turned, including Marilyn Strathern and, later, Michael O’Hanlon, for information and suggestions about research in the Highlands. Her responses, from letters and records, appear to have often been rather astringent.

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12 For the record, I knew Peter Lawrence in periods from the late 1970s until towards the end of his life in 1987, and had the opportunity to hear many stories from him about different styles and episodes of fieldwork, which (to his credit) he rarely repeated, but always seemed to have a large store of new ones.
In contrast to her absorption in fieldwork, Reay’s academic situations, and especially her appointment at The Australian National University, tried her, particularly in latter years. In his obituary, anthropologist Michael Young (2005:83) remarks that Reay observed a succession of male departmental chairs and different styles of academic leadership. ‘As a graduate student she had been exploited by Elkin, bullied by Nadel, and patronized by Stanner, so she took a dim view of god-professors in general, and tended to remain aloof from departmental politics’, he writes (ibid; see Reay 1992:138-139). From personal acquaintance with Marie when I was at The Australian National University in 1981 as a visiting junior academic, and from conversations in the late 90s when I and my family visited her in her home on the central coast of New South Wales, I can attest that, at least for some of her working years, she felt persecuted under particular departmental chairmanship. She said that she was closely monitored by Professor and departmental head Derek Freeman, who often gave her up to ten directives and notes a day about her duties, and (at some point) denied her the right of supervising postgraduate students (though she clearly did supervise a number of students, including Pacific and New Guinean scholars Grant McCall, Daryl Feil, Wayne Warry and Epeli Hau‘ofa). 13 She also, perhaps in conjunction with this, had some periods of mental instability and recurrent depression in later years.

Reay remained bitter about the treatment meted out to her to the end of her life. Probably not often mentioned outright, but certainly well known, was the fact that Marie was lesbian. She lived at some distance, with a female companion in a small town about 30 kilometres from Canberra, rather secluded from most university contacts. However, in some ways she was flamboyant rather than reclusive. For a period of time she drove a little, bright red sportscar. And as Young (2005:83) notes, she was socially active in many ways outside the university: she was a Justice of the Peace for many years, took an active role in developing Australian anthropological organizations, including the Institute of Aboriginal Studies from its founding in 1964, in literary affairs, and in cultivating relationships with friends and family. In her declining years she lived with her sister on the New South Wales coast north of Sydney, mainly hoping (she remarked sardonically) to outlive certain academics who had made her life difficult in Canberra.

Was Reay a feminist in the sense of having a particular interest in women’s lives, or liberation? Yes, in some ways, in my opinion; but not in others, almost despite herself. She focused in her Wahgi ethnographic work on certain topics,
as revealed in the archiving of her material: mushroom madness; ritual; folk tales; design, the structure of Kuma segmentary groups, various manifestations of principles ordering the wider society, and questions of conformity, constraint and freedom. Through it all, her focus on women’s lives, and the inequalities they lived with, came to shape a good part of what she did. This was not through prior decision or commitment on her part; in fact, the reality of women’s lives, and their work, seems not to have appealed to her, nor to have particularly evoked her sympathy or personal interest: she regarded it as tedious. She evidently found much more interesting the conduct of court cases, and politics, including developing electoral politics in Papua New Guinea. She was personally in sympathy with some individuals, following their ups and downs closely, and offering them help and rewards as seemed right to her: as mentioned above, she recorded in her notes her willingness to take Cass[Muru] to Chimbu to fulfil her desire to see her Chimbu partner again—a plan vetoed by Cass[Muru]’s brother’s vehement opposition. Her letters and notes reveal her plans and preparations to bring New Guinean visitors to Canberra. But despite this not having been her main interest, she attended ethnographically to the courtship and marital careers of Wahgi women over a long period. For it became apparent to her that the disposition of women was structurally central to Kuma society, and she clearly felt strongly about this. She was fascinated by the contrast between the freedom accorded to young girls to choose and pursue courting parties; and the vast limitation of their freedom that came about with marriage. She recorded unflinchingly the considerable amount of violence through which women were kept in line in Kuma society. This connected with a strong feeling she had concerning personal freedom, her view of women’s fate as denial of freedom to them, and her view of Wahgi society as riven by powerful tensions.

Reay seems to have drawn back somewhat from the Gender Relations in the Southwestern Pacific working group which convened at The Australian National University 1983-85, and brought many scholars together there—despite the fact that she had originally been involved in its planning. In conversation with Martha Macintyre, Reay expressed some dissent from what she saw as the preoccupations of this group. She took the view that its feminist orientation could only generate a partial and unrealistically rosy view of women’s lives in Papua New Guinea. She objected to views that she felt tended to detract from an understanding of inequality and power difference in male-female relations in Papua New Guinea (see Reay 1992:161).

In concluding this book Reay suggests that should women be treated more fairly and equally, and be enabled to have more control over their own lives—and she believes that this should happen—the society of the Minj Agamp as we know it would become unrecognisable, and its major structures would be significantly
altered. While much change has occurred in the meantime, it is difficult to say that the social order has become radically altered or unrecognisable. Nor have women become ‘free’ in the way Reay considered desirable. It is speculative, but all things considered, Reay may have shared some sense of oppression with them, especially in light of persecution she suffered in her academic situation, but perhaps also more generally.

Such sensibilities as these, however, did not make of her an easy personality. She had high academic standards. She was evidently an acute observer and admirable ethnographer, and left behind copious valuable field materials. An excellent and exacting writer herself, she could be an acerbic critic of other people’s expression. Michael Young (2005:83) remarks that she could be intimidating and abrasive to students and junior colleagues, though moderating her sharpness with sly, dry humour. She could be kind and generously attentive to students, recalls Wayne Warry, whom she visited in Port Moresby and in the field, in Chimbu Province. Many academics such as myself, who shared a corridor and many interests with her, found her at the best of times to be a sharp, receptive though sometimes slightly testy interlocutor and critic. If her not publishing this book in her lifetime was an exercise of the same critical sense against herself, I think that was unfortunate. The book is hereby available and readers can judge for themselves its place in feminist, anthropological, and specifically Melanesianist literatures.

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