

Introduction

Marilyn Strathern

This is a remarkable publication by any account. What has been so skilfully unearthed and edited by Francesca Merlan is a vivid first-hand description of conditions in the New Guinea Highlands encountered early on in the short decades between the establishment of the post-war administration and Papua New Guinea's independence. Its historical value is immense, and no small portion of that comes from the directness and immediacy of Marie Reay's presentation, which appears such a short step from original field notes. Therein, as the reader discovers, lies part of the author's craft. For she has compiled a work from a very specific viewpoint. On more than one occasion she was to remark that she had not gone to the Highlands to work on what subsequently was known as gender relations, and this account does not fit easily into the field of women-focused gender studies that followed her own early forays. Rather, the writing here was directly motivated by what she observed of the way women were treated.¹ The message is powerful. Sixty years on from her first observations in the mid-1950s, I imagine that *Wives and Wanderers* will turn out to be of great comparative interest to contemporary debates in Papua New Guinea about the role of violence in men's and women's affairs.

Reay must have been the first solo woman anthropologist to undertake ethnographic work in the Highlands, and as Merlan makes clear in her Editor's Introduction is certainly celebrated as the first to take up an interest in women's issues. We might conclude from the emphatic claim in her own authorial preface, namely '[B]eing a woman myself, I try to show in this book that the women of the Minj Agamp are people in their own right ...' (see Preface), that there was an axiomatic connection here. However that would be to lose a vital component of the story. Reay will not have been the only one of her generation to betray something of an ambivalence when it came to writing on women.

While not claiming to have plumbed this ambivalence, I signal the need to appreciate the complexity of her situation as an academic in the 1950s and 60s. Although she uses a vocabulary ('people in their own right') that was to characterize the emergent feminist anthropology of the 1970s, part of the spiritedness of her stance may well have sprung directly from her own initial struggles, rebellion even, to be taken seriously as an anthropologist.

1 'Predominantly interested in religion, politics, and a few other things, I came to the study of gender relations by the accident of working in a place where women were exploited, oppressed, and cruelly treated' [Statement, see footnote 3, probably 1983].

The double-bind was that to take her (only) as a 'woman' was not to take her seriously.² It is not irrelevant that a colleague who had known her for many decades should have remarked of the three senior men who overshadowed her years as a graduate student that they had exploited, bullied and patronized her in turn (Young 2005: 83). So there were occasions too when, far from joining cause with those interested in a focus on women's affairs, she instead spoke of her work *as an anthropologist*. As an anthropologist, she was interested in a spectrum of social activities, in the whole society, to adopt the argot of the period. The spectrum included what she herself put under the rubrics of religion and politics; indeed it may have been especially by her work in these areas that she would have wanted (at one stage at least) to be most remembered. Gender relations, she once stated, 'do not substitute for other aspects of social relations in ethnographic elucidation ... [although they do] usefully supplement them'.³ As Merlan reminds us, she was writing such supplements, notably 'Women in transitional society' (Reay 1966), at the same time as this account.

Interesting as the exercise would be, it would be less than true to Reay's own independence of mind to introduce this book in terms of what it might have meant to the world of scholarship—then and since—had it been published in (say) the late 1960s. One has to respect the fact that she chose not to publish it herself. As the reader will discover, the author did not place it in relation to other works of the time (Merlan notes the lack of references; the book did not physically exist on the same shelves), and to place it thus now would be to foreclose other courses of reflection on it. After all, if one thinks of the history of Melanesian ethnography,⁴ who knows what its intervention might have meant if it had appeared instead in the mid-1970s, or in the later 1980s. At the (supposed) point of publication, Reay might have provided such a contextualization herself, yet it would have been out of character with how she had presented the account in the draft we have now. What she wrote simply did not fall into any of the ethnographic genres of those times. If anything it might have been closer to the poetry that we know she was also writing. I don't have access to what her poems

2 I put it this way to re-capture something of the tenor of the time. This was also how she recollected it herself, years later, a point I return to below.

3 From her statement to the Gender Relations Research Group that she convened along with Roger Keesing and Michael Young in 1983-84 at The Australian National University (the group's project was called 'Gender relations in the southwestern Pacific: ideology, politics and production'). What of my own recollections of Marie Reay may have coloured this Introduction date both from this period, and from earlier periods of residence in Canberra (1969-72 and 1965).

4 The historical record was of concern to Reay. Had she contributed, as she at one point was planning, to the volume *Dealing with Inequality* (Strathern 1987) (which sprang from the 1983-84 project [see footnote 1]), it would have been in the form of an afterword entitled 'A historical commentary on the ethnography of gender (Highlands New Guinea)'. I may add that from Minj, where she was living at the time, she had taken the trouble to comment on several of the individual chapters.

were like, but take the genre in its broadest sense as allowing highly creative non-fiction. Meaningfully, her world of poetry was not one she introduced into the anthropological arena.⁵

Reay had already contributed a major ethnography in the conventional sense (*The Kuma*, 1959a), and one that was subsequently to be a pivot of much comparative work by others. In *Women and Wanderers* analysis remains very largely off stage (apart from its introductory chapter, there are some expository context-setting passages), and the pride of place is given to descriptions of people's doings, as they apparently occurred, in story-like form. Nonetheless there was a theoretical reason for presenting Minj (Reay's preferred name for Kuma in this volume) men and women in this way through these stories. Do not be mistaken: this book has a specific argument. There is far more to it than a rehearsal of the kind of spectacular detail—and here it is indeed spectacular detail—that is often referred to as ethnographic 'richness'. Yet to put it that way is to follow the curious marginalizing of detail that anthropologists sometimes indulge in, as though readers of ethnographies can take richness for granted. It would be a shame to do that here. So before we come to the argument, let me first comment on one dimension of the text's effectiveness.

Immediacy: The genre

Much ethnography is seemingly written of the moment. Yet the moment in which the ethnographer writes is also turned to the ends of exposition, and conveying a sense of immediacy has to compete with that. The trade-off between immediacy and reflection, between what is observed and what is analysed, seems inevitable. This was certainly true of the kind of ethnographic reporting that came out of the Highlands of Papua New Guinea in the 1960s and 70s, including Reay's own monograph. Ethnographers made greater or lesser attempts at conveying atmosphere, mood, ethos, in order to convey in turn some of the original immediacy of the impressions made on them. Reay does it here without making herself the obvious channel of such an experience. What we have in the present volume is neither an ethnography in the strict sense of the term nor the original field notes and diaries that were conventionally taken then as the most immediate form of writing. Rather, we have a re-creation, possibly something bordering on a 'reconstructive fantasy' (see footnote 3), which is

5 However Michael Young mentions her as a graceful writer of short stories as well (2005:84), and she certainly wrote creative non-fiction in prose form for her anthropological colleagues. One such work was a 'reconstructive fantasy' of some of 'the conditions in which patriliney could transform to matriliney'. Called 'Myth and matriliney', and entailing adaptations of myths from Foi, Kuma and Tubetube (draft paper, Australian National University Archives: ANUA 440. 2013. Marie Reay collection (item list)), she presents it herself as 'short short story'.

simultaneously the outcome of reflection (implying analysis) and able to convey the immediacy of living in a Minj Agamp world. The last point can be made by saying what genre this is not.

The subject matter concerns 'women' (as conveyed by the title(s)); the vehicles of narration are events. Thus while the narratives are indeed as much about women, and their doings and thoughts, as about men, the writerly device that carries the narratives is story-telling, taking the reader through longer or shorter sequences of events. The stories all have female protagonists. Accepting that they are designed to show us something of women's lives, an anthropologist would probably suggest that everything will turn on the kind of context the narrator chooses for his or her characters. Reay seemingly downplayed contextualization; in any case, other work meant that the larger framework of Minj 'society' could be taken as read. Here we are only told enough about what has been going on, or about women's relationships with others, to make sense of the particular events being described. Then again, although there are some wonderful pen portraits, none of the accounts is comparable to a life-history or biography. Instead we are presented with stretches of happenings and occurrences as they happened or occurred to named individuals ('all true cases' (see Chapter 1)). Now the narration of events as they follow or loop back on one another would have been familiar to analytical models of the time that took a 'case study' form. Yet these narratives are not extended case studies either. As much as they follow particular individuals in their relations with other, they also switch from this person's experiences to that person's, and only incidentally do they speak of background or future outcomes. These abbreviated contextualizations hardly have the revelatory coherence expected of a case study. Indeed, they as much echo a practice Reay herself brilliantly depicts: how Minj men are adept at finding a 'context' for creating a dispute or pursuing a claim in whatever history of prior events serves the purpose. They explain events by other events.

I am both exaggerating and being more explicit than Reay ever is. Yet the point is that I think she is being true to a particular tenor of life. She expressed it formally when (in a retrospective reflection) she referred to social relationships as the building blocks for social structure precisely because relationships had an inherent dynamism (Reay 1992: 139). Although this could be said of anywhere, perhaps in this style of narration she has caught a particular edge to the abruptness of people's incursions into one another's lives. In these narratives Minj Agamp often seem caught off guard by the actions of others or have to impress their will through what may seem over-determined or impetuous or wayward action. This is seemingly matched by the starkness with which Reay narrates people's attitudes and intentions. The stories would not be stories if they did not have speaking characters, yet in the events presented here what is spoken is often very brief and direct and without nuance. Perhaps it is relevant that much of

the dialogue concerns cross-sex interactions. (We are not given either the kind of allusive rhetoric or involuted gossip that men and women might conceivably have directed to those of their own sex, nor the subtleties she refers to at the beginning of her Preface.) What is certainly relevant is that the stories told here deal with facets of men's and women's relationships with one another. More specifically, the different topics revolve largely around the disposition of women (in marriage) between men, and women's subsequent protests.

On this it is worth emphasizing what the Editor also underlines, for Reay came back to it again and again in her writings, and it is practically the first observation she talked about in her retrospective piece: how much she had been much struck by the practice of wife-takers forcibly seizing or kidnapping ('pulling') their brides. Whether from the men's point of view a woman was being 'taken', or as also happened, peacefully 'given', being coerced to marry accompanied a violent abruptness written into every woman's life. Plainly the transformation from girl into wife was not unexpected as a practice, because it was everyone's (woman-speaking) fate, but it could be unexpected as an event, in the here and now, in the way it happened, in this manner rather than that manner. Seizure was designed to ride rough-shod over the woman's feelings, whether or not her kin were in connivance. And other events followed: the way young women were seized or otherwise handed over had all kinds of repercussions, including, as we shall see, how the reputation of being a wanderer was acquired.

This aspect of Agamp life is seemingly well served by relating events that show men and women impinging on one another's actions, motives, values. At the same time the concept of 'event', as I have been using it, seems to summon too abstract a sense of (naturalized) space-time; maybe that of (interpersonal) 'encounter' serves better. It was not her term but, in a paper that came out in the same year as her monograph (Reay 1959b), Reay had talked of encounters staged between men and women. The dramatic one-day fighting games, which typified what she spoke of as conflict between the sexes, were interestingly open-ended. Indeed one might think of them as experimental probings of what the effect of such interchanges might be, how far each side could push the other, what either would be provoked to reveal to the other. Drawing from this, one might say that an element in any 'encounter' is its unpredictability: people try to guess what will happen, watch how others behave, see how this or that person will react. The dynamic of the relationship makes outcomes for a moment unknown.

It is in producing a narrative of encounters that Reay exploits the genre of story-telling. It enables her to capture quick changes from moment to moment, to follow sequences of actions as well as words, imagine people's thoughts and feelings, and conjure what they said from what she remembered or noted or had heard from countless situations similar to that being described. The result is obviously not a novel, and seems far from the kind of semi-fiction that allows

events to be re-arranged.⁶ Of course I do not know for sure, but part of the intention seems to have been a fidelity to the unfolding of events themselves: it is the encounters that carry the message. If this is true, it is presaged in the delicacy with which she introduces the names of her characters. English names (fiction) they are not, even though they are in English (creative non-fiction).⁷

Reflection: The argument

This book captures a poignant moment in the colonial experience of the people of the Wahgi Valley. Like the analysis, the colonists are off stage too, yet the effect of their presence is pervasive. It is there in the demeanour of women, in the hesitations of men, in the sequence of 'local leaders' (*luluai*⁸ and *tultul*⁹ to councillors), and is crystallized from time to time in references to the kiap's court (Court of Native Affairs). One constant refrain when a pig ceremonial was impending was the threat of imprisonment that came with Government officers' disapproval of certain practices. This is argument by stealth, so to speak, since in other writing Reay was quite explicit about the incursions of kiaps' views on the nature of bride wealth (imagining it as placing a value on a woman's head, as a purchase would) and on the need to base marriage on a bride's willingness to go to a particular man (as though marriage concerned the bride and groom above their clans and subclans). Indeed the unpublished outline of a longer work (see footnote 15), as Merlan describes it in the Editor's Introduction, clearly laid out an argument that could be applied to the present volume; Merlan draws attention to the explicit note on which *Wives and Wanderers* ends.

Perhaps it was the recency and impact of Government intervention, and anticipation of more changes to come, that led Reay to speculate not only on the future of Minj Agamp but on their past. Drawing on archaeological materials available at the time (they were to be drastically altered by subsequent study in ways she could not have foreseen), she imagines earlier conditions of oppression. She ponders on the changes that might have come about with the introduction of pigs and sweet potato, as she understood them to have been, just as she ponders on what *laik bilong meri* [again, see Editor's Introduction] might mean for the future flourishing of Minj society. She was of her own time, anthropologically speaking, in her grasp of 'society' as an entity to be studied. However inflected by its historical location, it had an analysable coherence, one in which men's

6 As when the focus is on the characters.

7 They are translated, with some linguistic flourishes of her own, from the vernacular. In 'The politics of a witch-killing' (Reay 1976) she uses regular English names (Joe, Malcolm etc).

8 A village or tribal chief appointed by the government. Originally it meant a leader in battle (Mihalic 1971:125).

9 The assistant village chief appointed by the government; he is second in command in a village or area. Originally he was the messenger for the *luluai*. Sometimes also he served as interpreter (Mihalic 1971:199).

affairs were important. So although the story-lines follow women, which gives them some centrality, when men come into a story there is no particular attempt to describe them (the men) from a woman's perspective—they appear as the author knows them from their own spheres of action. For all that she takes up a 'woman's viewpoint' (see Chapter 1), then, it is a view that attends specifically to various 'fields' of women's lives and to their protests about their situation. The present volume does not invite us to take a woman's perspective on (say) male arenas of public activity.¹⁰

Reay is quite clear that those arenas were only viable because of what women made possible—the form of men's politics and ritual would not have occurred without it. She shows the underpinnings of male activity both through the work women did (this is part of her opening argument about Wahgi prehistory, but is not further documented here), and through their being principal vehicles for men's alliances. This is a message that is drummed home again and again. Yet it is all very well concluding in abstract terms that men depend on women for their relations with other men, or that men's interests always came first. That is not the form in which such realities appear to the actors. Reay's argument on this score is presented concretely and vividly in the movement of the stories. The effect of laying out encounters (events) conveys the remorseless repetition of actions, the moment at which the blow is dealt, the haphazard routine careless rough handling of being 'pulled', and just how women stage their protests.

For all that the dynamics of an 'encounter' introduces an uncertainty as to how any particular episode will end, the stories, one after another, also convey certain predictabilities of outcome. There were only so many possibilities open to the way in which marriages were set up, the very notion of marriage implying the moment at which diverse men—the prospective groom, a former betrothed, the girl's fathers, brothers and mother's brothers, along with the subclans of these men—would reveal their interests in the girl. This set the scene for men's anxieties, whether in relation to the prospective bride, in relation to the men on whom they had claims, or in relation to their competitors. Nonetheless, negotiations between in-laws, not to speak of losing and gaining with rivals, was all part of what men expected from one another. Of the bride who was the object of their efforts, these stories equally tell of how often they would be faced with the outcome of other men's actions in quite another register—men succumbing to girls' desires as 'courting' partners. For girls (not the men), becoming a wife put an end to that.

10 See the section in Reay (1959a:181) called 'Women's interpretation of male values'. Nonetheless, had the volume been published in the (later) 1960s, it would have long preceded later claims that there had been no serious attention paid to women's spheres of actions.

Minj stereotypes of the good and bad wife that Reay describes (elaborated in 1959a) were not just judgements on the differing characters of women; they expressed, from the perspective of 'good' wives and their menfolk, expectations about what marriage meant to the subclans negotiating it. Reay's emphasis in this volume, and she makes it evident, rests on those who protest at their fate. They seemingly had little positive language through which to express themselves, beyond playing on the fact of their own desires for this or that person.¹¹ However they were prone to being the objects of considerable negative stereotyping. The possibility of a young woman being stigmatized as a 'wandering woman' does not seem to have been far below the surface of marriage negotiations, even though the number of Minj women whose whole lives acted out that stereotype were very few. It came to the surface as soon as a woman showed she was resisting what her menfolk had planned for her.

Without the words (or wealth) with which to put her case, a young woman could nonetheless demonstrate something of her position through her actions. She could run away from the husband marked for her. However, there were only two places to run to—back home to her own kin or to another man. For women who wanted to avoid the reputation of being a 'wanderer' this was a double-bind. While going off to another man courted the reputation of someone prepared to go from man to man, going back to the kin who had organized her marriage in the first place was not necessarily any escape either. Moreover, if sending her back again did not work then *they* would send her off to another man, and in some cases there were whole strings of such attempts. In other words, men's obligations to other men created the 'wandering woman' pattern as they passed their kinswoman from this person to that person.¹² They were not necessarily going against a girl's specific desire for different partners: there appear to be examples here of girls not really knowing what they want, apart from wanting to make a protest.

This, we might say, is a Minj version of the kind of double-bind gender situations in which women have found themselves in other contexts.¹³ These situations have taken different forms, and might have been generated by different issues, but in numerous societies of the old New Guinea Highlands women seemed to have borne the brunt of men's ambitions and men's dependence on them.

11 Non-marriage was not a viable alternative, although Reay imagined this might change in the future.

12 In some cases a prospective husband did this, for another in his subclan, to a woman he did not want as a wife for himself. Reay also records a fascinating conversation in which two men ponder on the fact that it would be very difficult for older men to find (more) wives if women did not (and thus to the men's advantage) run away from their husbands (Chapter 8)! Such expectations no doubt fed into the picture men built up of women's waywardness, not knowing what was in their mind (see Chapter 8).

13 Across the Highlands was also the more general double-bind women experienced when caught between kin and spouse: the same people (her husbands, brothers) whose interests a woman should ideally promote, and to whom she could appeal, were those who were also prepared to pursue *their* interests in her at her expense. Women being scapegoated for troubles between male affines was part of the phenomenon.

None of this is to mitigate the force of women's own actions and the events they set in train, and quite emphatically Reay does not want us to forget this side of things. At the same time, the stories in this book show—and it is an argument we can take away from them—just how at a particular point in their lives Minj women have often had no recourse but to act in ways that jeopardize their future prospects.

Coda

Reay had not just been struck by the practice of 'pulling' brides, she was upset by the often brutal way in which girls were dragged off, and conveyed her reaction to the people around her. I wonder if recounting some of the events she witnessed brought writerly relief. I wonder too if this is not where we encounter something of her ambivalence. For as far as her main publications were concerned, she was not going to argue from a woman's perspective in order to re-write the sociology.¹⁴ Sorry as she might be for women's slave-like status, that of itself did not make them into central anthropological subjects. At times she voiced the opinion that much of what women did was dull. 'I had no intention', she recollects (Reay 1992:158), 'of giving a derogatory picture of Kuma [Minj] society by focusing on the slave population'.¹⁵

Her extreme language ('slave population') belonged to the early era of investigations in the Highlands that had led to the model of 'sexual antagonism' between men and women. The myriad conflicts played out in these stories are testimony to some of the circumstances that lay behind that. This is not the moment to take stock of the anthropological debates that ensued. However, in the light of issues current in today's Papua New Guinea to do with domestic violence, largely men's violence against women, it may be the place to reflect on certain dimensions of Minj society in the 1950s and 60s. Reay herself had no compunction about drawing on her Minj material in order to depict life in the Papua New Guinea Highlands at a large.¹⁶ But for all the features that Minj Agamp shared with their neighbours, there were many they did not or, better put, combined at that point in time in their own particular way. The effects of such combinations run throughout these narratives. A significant point, then, on which the book would be interesting for current concerns over violence is

14 Though she was prepared to write on the 'status of women' in Papua New Guinea at large, and had views on what it might really take to improve their lot, in Minj [Kuma] as well as more widely (e.g., 1966).

15 As Merlan has discovered, she must have had something of a change of heart later, with her plans for a full length work. This comment was her recollected reaction to the suggestion that she might write her PhD thesis on women.

16 This is not to imply that she was not interested in anthropological comparison. Additionally, at various points she specifically contrasted Minj Agamp with their neighbours, including comments made by Minj folk on the differences.

its reminder of an anthropological truth. While, on the one hand, it is important to identify a common (and in this case depressingly widespread) phenomenon, on the other hand, one of the anthropologist's jobs is to observe the micro-processes at work. Such processes simultaneously point to general enabling factors and render them with exquisite¹⁷ local distinctiveness. We need both eyes on what is happening.

One or two aspects of Minj society illuminate the then conditions of possibility for the plight of young girls at the moment of marriage, which could so easily turn them into archetypes of wandering women, and which affected their options for action. Reay considered these aspects in various (published and unpublished) contexts, and they recall the kinds of topics that anthropologists of the time were discussing.¹⁸ Men in Minj of the time seem to have got themselves into the position of competing with one another over the disposal of women in ways that complexified everyone's lives.

First, Minj women were in a position to protest at their marital circumstances precisely because they had had experience of a life before marriage in which it was they who had been encouraged to take the initiative in relation to men. The abrupt reversal of affairs was to be depicted by Reay as a kind of initiation for girls, though superficially it had very different contours from boys' harsh (at one point she describes it as 'brutal') subjugation. It is worth remembering that the practice and violence of initiation varied widely across Highlands societies. The 'breaking in' (see Chapter 1) of adolescent girls in Minj specifically involved men being assertive ('pulling' brides) where once it had been the girls who were assertive. This is of course an explicit theme of the present book.

Secondly, Minj society was among those where men's relations with other men included diverse possibilities for their subclan making claims on one another's womenfolk, summed up in the adage of 'sister exchange' (by no means universally the case in the Highlands). There were many roads to such arrangements. Thus one man (subclan) might claim another (subclan)'s daughters or sisters, either in order to marry the woman himself, or to bestow her on other men who in turn had claims on him. In kinship terms these were variously thoughts of as rights to one's (one's father's/subclan's) cross-cousins, or on the subclan to which a 'father's sister' had earlier gone in marriage, or over an in-law's 'sister'.¹⁹

17 An epithet in English that can refer to pain as well as pleasure. I write 'local' as to time or place; this does not equate with what is indigenous or traditional—Reay consistently drew attention to changing historical conditions.

18 It hardly need be said that many other issues come into play as well, especially to do with the aftermath of pacification such as increasing wealth in circulation (see, for example Merlan and Rumsey 1991: 25-26), and a wider field of contacts over which men could pursue their claims.

19 However, they may also 'give them [sisters, daughters] to affines or non-agnatic cognates who present them to clansmen who need wives' (Reay 1975-76: 91), so that even 'marriages with spouses who lack precise genealogical specification' (loc. cit) would nonetheless be the outcome of debt relations between men across

Chains of obligations, expectations and disappointments in these matters threaded their way through men's affairs. As Reay observed elsewhere (1975-76: 92), and in objection to simplistic models of woman-exchange between two groups, Minj [men] 'are thus able to disperse the activity of wife-giving into a process involving three or more wife-givers in the arrangement of a single marriage'. Trying to forestall later trouble by giving early betrothal payments to assert a claim on a particular individual, as men did especially over the first girl born to a relative obliged to help him, did not mean that when the time came she was necessarily willing to go to him (see Chapter 1).

A third observation is that the rationale for the way in which men thus sorted out their affairs through women was not confined to marriage; women were 'given' to repay debts with other origins and rationales, such as liability for a death, as is mentioned in these pages (see Chapter 14) (and see Reay 1992: 146). It would have to be a specially heavy debt, but such occasions contribute to the impression that Minj men seemed concerned less with women's part in the break-up of marriages (as might be the emphasis in other societies) than with getting women to go where they wanted in the first place.

This in turn, fourthly, may have affected the degree of support that a woman's kin gave her, if she were mistreated or sought refuge with them, at different moments in her life. Minj men sought wives from their friends and allies in war, and from temporary enemies (who might be intermittently friendly and hostile), but not, as in some parts of the Highlands, from permanent enemies. Allies were men who had close and multiple interests in one another's affairs. The focus in these stories is the way in which marriage is instigated, and as we have seen that was the very moment in time at which the interests neither of her parents or brothers nor, for that matter, of her usually benign mother's kin necessarily coincided with her own. Their persona was now that of 'wife-giver' to their allies.

Finally, while the marriage payments were as everywhere part of a nexus of life-cycle reciprocities between affines, given other kinds of obligations that were being met, such payments seem to have had an ambiguous place in the way Minj Agamp instigated conjugal relations. Of special note is the fact that, driven by a fear of waywardness on women's part (suppose the woman ran away!), or anticipating possible laziness or childlessness, men often delayed making such payments until the birth of the first child (Reay 1959a: 100; and see Chapter 1).²⁰ Men's scepticism thus created a period of uncertainty in which a new wife was so to speak put under a 'test' of fidelity before either her in-laws or her

several different clans. Reay also makes it clear that the principal perspective is not that of the prospective spouses but of the senior relatives with women to bestow and claim (that is, of the wife-givers and wife-takers, to use the anthropological idiom of the time).

20 Outside the hyper-active period of a clan's Pig Ceremonial (see Chapter 1).

kin found themselves fully committed to the union through wealth exchange. This was by no means true of all bride wealth-giving societies in the Highlands. In Minj, waiting to see whether or not a woman would become a wanderer publicly reiterated the possibility that it might happen to anyone.

This is but the beginning of a list of issues on which Reay wrote in other venues. She did not shrink from pointing to the predicaments and problems that people pose for one another, and in some manner always will. Here in this volume, and the numerous stories it tells of a period in Minj lives, we witness the kinds of encounters that sharpened her observation of such a home truth. The anthropological record is considerably the better for it.

Acknowledgements

This is a rather belated tribute to Marie Reay's work. She was a very present figure in my early efforts at understanding Highlands societies, and the Kuma (Minj Agamp) a significant point of comparison; I appreciate the opportunity to make my debt explicit. Needless to say the opportunity would not have come without Francesca's Merlan's brilliant initiative, as well as Judith Wilson's initial care and Ria van de Zandt's formidable input to the present volume.

As to our interactions, I have a few carbon copies of letters from an intermittent correspondence with Marie in the 1970s-80s, which remind me what warm terms we came to be on. That was not how it began—the first letter I received from her is cherished in my memory for the double rebuff, both to my presumption to be a scholar (it began 'in your undated letter about your proposed fieldwork in the Mt Hagen area ...') and the limitations on women being subjects of study. Reay's letter to me was sent in 1963, in response to an introductory letter from myself. Reay was making an implicit contrast with my proposed study as I had sketched it in my introductory letter to her, as to be conducted at the same time as field research of Andrew Strathern, 'roughly along the male-female divide', and with reference to 'aspects of female status in Hagen'. Said Reay in her initial response to me: 'My own study has emphasized the position of women simply because this happens to be crucial to Kuma society, not because of the sex of the investigator or any special interest of my own'.

References

- Australian National University Archives: ANUA 440. 2013. Marie Reay collection (item list), available at <http://archivescollection.anu.edu.au/index.php/marie-reay-collection> (accessed 26 February 2014).
- Merlan, Francesca and Alan Rumsey 1991. *Ku Waru: Language and Segmentary Politics in the Western Nebilyer Valley, Papua New Guinea*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Mihalic, F. 1971. *The Jacaranda Dictionary and Grammar of Melanesian Pidgin*. Milton, Qld: The Jacaranda Press.
- Reay, Marie 1959a. *The Kuma: Freedom and Conformity in the New Guinea Highlands*. Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press.
- Reay, Marie 1959b. 'Two kinds of ritual conflict', *Oceania* 29: 290-296.
- Reay, Marie 1966. 'Women in transitional society', in E. K. Fiske (ed.), *New Guinea on the Threshold: Aspects of Social, Political, and Economic Development*. Canberra: ANU Press, pp. 166-184.
- Reay, Marie 1975-76. 'When a group of men takes a husband: A review article', *Anthropological Forum*, 4(1) : 77-96.
- Reay, Marie 1976. 'The politics of a witch-killing', *Oceania* 47(1): 1-20.
- Reay, Marie 1992. 'An innocent in the Garden of Eden', in Terence Hays (ed.), *Ethnographic Presents: Pioneering Anthropologists in the Papua New Guinea Highlands*. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 137-166.
- Strathern, Marilyn (ed.) 1987. *Dealing with Inequality. Analysing Gender Relations in Melanesia and Beyond*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Young, Michael 2005. 'Obituary: Marie Olive Reay, born Maitland, NSW, died Booragul, NSW, 16 September 2004, aged 82', *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology*, 6(1): 81-84.

This text taken from *Wives and Wanderers in a New Guinea Highlands Society:
Women's lives in the Waghi Valley*, by Marie Olive Reay,
edited by Francesca Merlan with additional introduction by Marilyn Strathern,
published 2014 by ANU Press,
The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.