P. Brown, *Highland Peoples of New Guinea*
Marilyn Strathern

Twenty years of publication on the New Guinea Highlands have produced as many full-scale ethnographies. Yet till now there have been few attempts at any regionwide presentation beyond the comparative treatment of specific topics (such as descent ideology, bigmanship, relations between the sexes). Perhaps we can take the innovation of Paula Brown's book as a good omen. Rubel and Rosman have already followed with a systemic analysis of structural variation (*Your Own Pigs You May Not Eat*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1978), though their study is not confined to the Highlands. Brown, however, is concerned to define a geographical region (the central montane areas of Papua New Guinea and Irian Jaya) and describe social and cultural forms found within it.

"Highlands culture" is distinctive; the many local variations cannot be reduced to simple ecological features, but a broad contrast is to be drawn between central and fringe societies. The theme of this book is the general interrelationship between ecological zones, demography, agricultural practice and organisational complexity.

Its main findings are that across the seventeen societies for which suitable data exist, clan areas remain relatively constant in size, higher population densities producing more numerous (larger) groups. Population density is itself correlated with "agricultural intensity" and "individualisation" of land tenure. There is a developmental paradigm here, though the author makes it clear that she has identified a problem rather than solved one. My reservation is terminological: thus the indices of agricultural "intensity" include coping with demographic pressure (e.g. short fallow cycles) which is rather different from a notion of complexity or sophistication in technique. The contrast between individual and group access to land is also unfortunately phrased, if only because it is likely to be misinterpreted by the readership for which this book is intended. The same contrast reappears in the analysis of ceremonial exchange.

The accomplishment of this account is the deft and straightforward manner in which a vast amount of material has been marshalled together. Family, kinship, locality, ceremony, warfare are all considered, making this the first comprehensive and general introduction to the area. It will be most useful as initial teaching material. Moreover, there is enough detail—derived mainly from Brown's self-confessed Chimbu perspective—to turn students towards the still fertile 20-year old mound of ethnography which has only just begun to yield a sociology of the Highlands.

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Cet ouvrage s'inscrit dans la série des témoignages sur le travail en milieu rural depuis le milieu du siècle dernier, qu'inaugurait *Village Life and Labour*, du même auteur, paru en 1975. Il ne s'agit plus ici de ceux qui cultivent la terre, mais de ceux qui en extraient les produits transformables par l'industrie. R. Samuel insiste dans son avant-