



MONO KOAME

Wij denken ook

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Mono koame

Ethnography as interdisciplinary representation

1.

This ethnography - although published in Dutch - is offered under the banner of the Centre for Pacific and Asian Studies at the University of Nijmegen, because we consider it as a major contribution to Melanesian ethnography. The book is the result of close co-operation between a missionary-ethnographer and a psychiatrist. It is about the Yahray, a people living in the South of Papua. At the time of the fieldwork for this ethnography, the area was part of a Dutch colony, *Nieuw Guinea*. Like very many sources that came into being during the Dutch administration of this part of Melanesia, this ethnography too has been written in Dutch. Much of the information that it contains can also be found in a publication in English, Boelaars' *Head-hunters about Themselves* (1981). However, compared to that publication, *Mono Koame* is of a different nature. Not only differs the central question in this new book, as a result of interdisciplinary co-operation the way in which the Yahray have been represented has become quite different. Therefore, we offer this rather extensive introduction in English, to bring the ethnography to the attention of a wider public. Those who want to study the ethnography of Papua in depth, however, should master at least a passive knowledge of the Dutch language. According to current ideas, *Head-hunters* can be called a 'realist ethnography'. *Mono Koame*, however, may be considered an 'experimental ethnography' *avant la lettre*. Here we refer to representational genres that gradually came to be recognised after the influential publications of Marcus and Cushman (1982), Clifford (1983), and Geertz (1988). These genres have extensively been described by Van Maanen in his terse essay *Tales from the Field*, a booklet dating from 1988, but still an outstanding guide. Following Van Maanen, we characterise *Mono Koame* as 'experimental ethnography' because of the 'blurring of genres'. Partly this generic form results from the multidisciplinary quality of the ethnography, partly it results from 'giving a voice' to the Yahray. At first sight, this latter quality was also immanent in *Head-hunters about Themselves* (our italics). However, notwithstanding the many Yahray 'tales' in that book, giving a fair view of how these people experienced their life, the 'voice' of the ethnographer was dominant, fitting into the realist style, current by that time. Perhaps it is too much to call *Mono Koame* a 'Jointly Told Tale' (Van Maanen 1988:136ff.), but it certainly has several of its characteristics. Rather than *Head-hunters*, this book rests on polyphonic authority; the central question urges to reflection, and the description oscillates between two meaning systems (to borrow a phrase from representation-theory) of equal validity (Van Maanen 1988:138; Hall 1997).

In this introduction, we shall first specify the character of this ethnography and try to indicate its position with regards to recent ethnographic theories, in which the concepts 'representation' (or 'construction') and 'reflection' stand out.

1. Responsible for this Introduction are A. Borsboom, L. Buskens and J. Kommers. Prof. Borsboom (Nijmegen) is head of the Centre for Pacific and Asian Studies, Prof. Buskens (Leiden) is an anthropologist and *amateur* of ethnography and ethnographic artefacts relating to New Guinea and dr. Kommers (Nijmegen) is an anthropologist; he specialised in ethnography as genre. We considered it a great honour to write an introduction to this ethnography and we want to express our gratitude to Harry Boelaars, cousin to the author, who acted as 'mediator', and supplied biographical information. We finished this introduction on December 5th, 2001.

Second, we will summarise some of the main points of this book in English, on behalf of readers not versed in Dutch. In this section, there are references to parallel parts in *Head-hunters*.

Third, we shall indicate the position of the book within the wider frame of Melanesian studies. Because of the extreme variety of cultures in this part of the world (and South Papua is an example *par excellence* of this), until this very day the area plays a main role in ethnography, anthropology, and linguistics.

Finally, we shall pay attention to the contribution missionaries offered to ethnography. A main characteristic of the Catholic Missions in the former Dutch New Guinea is the open attitude to the cultures, which contributed very much to the outstanding quality of their ethnographic works.

2.

This book about the Yahray, a people living in the South of (West) Papua, is one of the last authentic documents that came into being in a period that is closed for ever (see also Boelaars 1981:7). This authenticity is one aspect why, in our opinion, the work deserves publication. However, there is much more than that.

The book rests on intimate fieldwork, done by Father J. Boelaars about the middle of the twentieth century (a ten-year period, starting in 1951). For this book, Father Boelaars, who has a reputation as an ethnographer of Papua people, co-operated with Mr. A. Blom (formerly a *gouvernementsarts*, medical doctor at the service of the colonial government, 1958-1962, and later on a social psychiatrist).

Both Father Boelaars and Mr. Blom are what we may now call 'of an earlier generation'. This not only gave them the opportunity to experience life in New Guinea during an important period in colonial history, it also characterises their interpretations. The theories used in this book partly reflect ideas from the mid-twentieth century. But the main question which constitutes the core of this publication, has been inspired by recent processes of intercultural communication, characterising many of today's Western societies as well.

As said, this makes the book quite distinct from earlier ethnographies written by Father Boelaars.

In Van Baal's introduction to the *Head-hunters*, this study is called "an important contribution to our knowledge" of until then almost unknown parts of the former Dutch New Guinea. In this introduction, it may be of interest to quote Van Baal fully. He expressed his conviction that the study would provide a

"strong stimulus for further research in this isolated area, which still holds many secrets which, disclosed, promise a better understanding of the perplexing diversity of cultures that is characteristic of this part of the Papuan lowlands. *There is not a second area in the world where cultural diversity has assumed such extreme proportions as exactly here.* The opportunities for research are still there. *But time is short. The wind of change is blowing everywhere*" (1981: VX, our italics).

Next to this conviction of the monograph being a "contribution to the body of anthropological information generally", as phrased by Boelaars too, the author himself expressed his hope that the study would be of practical use. At that time he thought of other missionaries as well as of government agencies. He ends his preface by directing himself in a touching way to the people themselves:

"My Jaqaj friends, if any of them were able to read this book, would hardly be expected to rejoice in the recollections of their past. Their eyes are on the future. All I wish for them is that part of the old strength and energy of their ancestors will stay with them. They will need it on the difficult road to a new way of life." (1981:V)²

Twenty years ago it was still common to consider 'ethnographic material' as contributing to a corpus. During the period of what was called 'the crisis in anthropology' this idea was criticised fiercely. Some students thought of ethnography as intellectual colonialism, depriving other peoples of their knowledge about themselves, just to enrich western science. Others considered ethnographies as only 'adding more of the same stuff to a theoretically impoverished anthropology' (Kloos 1984). Both parties now prove to have been totally wrong.

The first category greatly underscored humanitarian motives that always drove many ethnographers. *Head-hunters* as well as this new book testifies the close sympathy of the ethnographer with the people of Papua. And in this respect he is only one of the many missionary-ethnographers who laid the foundation of the ethnography of South West Papua and who all felt very much concerned with the fate of the people. All their studies strongly express how they identified with 'their' people.

But, what is more (and perhaps surpassing Boelaars's earlier expectations): in current processes of rediscovering their own past by peoples everywhere in the world, - often in reaction to 'globalisation' - colonial ethnographies are certainly appreciated by the descendants of the former 'subjects'. As a rule, in studies of *reinvention of tradition* and the like, authors point at the use of *information* offered in those early ethnographies by the people who are living now. An important idea is that this information can be manipulated by today's politicians, e.g. in the process of adapting to new circumstances. However, this is only one aspect, stressing a pragmatic use. As becomes clear from the works of many 'non western' writers, this is only one side of the medal. Another one, and perhaps more important for the common people in their daily life, is that these ethnographies captured aspects of life that may give the new generations renewed admission to what Boelaars called "the strength and energy of their ancestors." We think this is a major point, often escaping political attention to the 're-invention of tradition' (compare Mazrui 1987, who straightforwardly points to this dimension of culture and everyday life).

Those who saw ethnographies as only more of the same stuff, *a posteriori* also proved wrong. They focussed at theory formation in itself, e.g. at designing an all-encompassing paradigm. Fragmentation of anthropological theory was considered to be a threat to the discipline and a sign of 'crisis'. By then, those students did not understand that fragmentation was inherent to a post-colonial worldview. Fragmented theories could only be replaced by one unifying paradigm in an artificial way, by neglecting the very essence of modern life.

Therefore, these students, like those of the former category, have been put to silence in the course of history.

2. It is noteworthy to point at a slight difference between this phrasing and the one that concludes the Foreword to *Vechten of Sterven* (*Per modum manuscripti*, n.d.): "I hope with all my heart that they may retain their fighting spirit, to overcome the difficulties of the new area that they entered". (our translation). In this same Foreword Father Boelaars explicitly testified the great respect with which he analysed the Yahray culture.

Experimental and reflective anthropologists, many related to what has become known as *post-modern* tendencies, stressed the implicit theory inherent to every description. But, above all, they pointed at the importance of ethnographies, not primarily as 'material' to be added to the ethnographic *corpus*, but in the first place as *contributions to the ever-ongoing discourse, characterising multi-cultural society*. It is precisely this insight that makes *Mono Koame* of crucial importance now, and makes it a worthy addition to Boelaars's earlier ethnographies. The very title of the book resulted from discourse! (see below). The meeting of people from different cultural backgrounds is the quintessence of this new book. Its representation of the Yahray is a contribution to the study of inter-cultural communication, a phenomenon that is fundamental to societies all over the world. The 'post-modern' view of ethnography as ongoing communication (Clifford 1983; Van Maanen 1988:x) implies a constant re-interpretation of ethnographies. *Mono Koame* is a splendid example of such re-interpretation of field experiences from the past, contributing to new forms of inter-cultural communication. In this book, Boelaars and Blom significantly surpass the expectations expressed in *Head-hunters*.

3.

There is an important methodological principle underlying ethnography, expressed by the founders of the sociographic tradition. It says that interpretation should be separated from description, thus enabling the reader to judge what is authentic and what has been added by the author. It is this principle that attributed to the appreciation of ethnography as a 'timeless treasure', i.e. to the insight that ethnography can be re-interpreted again and again. Closely related to this view was the idea of 'salvation anthropology' to which Van Baal alluded in his phrase cited above. This idea, suggesting the possibility of *reconstructing* cultures that disappeared, also has been criticised. However, ethnography nowadays proves to be of importance in this sphere too, although instead of reconstruction, one should think of re-interpretation and re-shaping (see Maude 1989).

To a great extent the authors of this book indicate their interpretations explicitly. In anthropology this distinction between representation and interpretation is of special importance, because many anthropologists, more than other social scientists, appreciate so-called 'description': ethnography that does not disappear behind theoretical notions. Originally, ethnography was considered a 'tool' to theoretical representations, but when scientists all over the world were experiencing the rapid 'extinction of native ways of life', ethnography became an aim in itself. The ethnographer should document as precisely as possible those ways of life and contribute in this way to a testimony of Man's cultural diversity.

4.

Of course, ethnographers were very well aware of the impossibility of 'pure description' already in the time before *the literary turn in anthropology* came into existence. 'Salvation anthropology' never stayed undisputed. However, closely connected to ideas about the disappearance of 'original' autochthonous cultures, anthropologists got used to appreciate in a special way authentic descriptions of those cultures. Thus, Lévi-Strauss once called the ethnographic reports of the Bureau of American Ethnology "sacrosanct volumes" and other ethnographic *classics* "treasure troves of knowledge" (1966; see Trouwborst 1970). Appreciation of description changed with the aims one had in mind. During the hey-day of identity-studies anthropologists could experience how the peoples themselves discovered (colonial) ethnographies as sources to 're-invent' parts of their identity (Ranger 1983, also

1993). The growth of historical studies in anthropology too stimulated appreciation of description. The antiquarian book-trade offers a clear indication of this: (old) descriptive studies are much more valuable than their contemporary theoretical works.

Thus, notwithstanding positivist as well as reflexive criticisms of the notion of 'pure description', the idea that ethnographies are of importance as (future) sources for interpretation and can always be 'recycled', retained many adherents among anthropologists (and historians). After a tendency to integrate theory and ethnography, resulting in works that are difficult to read for 'outsiders', some scholars realised the danger of this development for interdisciplinary approaches (Jaarsma 2000). This trend all the more became a problem when ethnography was redefined as part of an ongoing process of intercultural communication, rather than as a 'source' for the development of theory. If it becomes impossible to understand an ethnography without being profoundly versed in the works of Bourdieu, or of Foucault, exclusiveness is a real threat to this kind of exchange.

5.

By looking at recent as well as historical developments concerning anthropology, one can state that this book about the Yahray surprises in its form and contents. As said, the work displays many elements of what is now called 'experimental ethnography'. First, there is the important position of the people concerned in the ethnography, the 'voice' that is given to them. Within this 'Tale from the Field' (compare Van Maanen 1988) the 'tales' told by identifiable representatives of Yahray society are prominent. These tales are *authentic*. That is: they retain their generic characteristics (see e.g. Shostak 1983). Stylistic and literary aspects, sometimes 'superfluous' in the eyes of the outsider but essential for interpretation, like repetitive phrases, are duly rendered (see e.g. p.132). Where this form of representation stands in the way of the outsider's intelligibility, the author explains or interprets, without endangering authenticity. That means that the integrity of the Yahray 'authors' only minimally suffers from translation. In this respect, the title of the book is revealing: *Mono Koame*, which means: 'we also think'³ (p. 5, 228, 289). In this book they express their own thinking in their own voices. Attention is paid to different forms of expression.

Second, as already indicated, interpretation - to an important extent - explicitly aims at mutual understanding, at intercultural communication. One of the main questions underlying this book is: 'How can we understand the Other; what is going on in the Other's minds?' This question is closely related with a reflexive one, concerning 'ourselves', the 'outsiders'. The ethnography mainly gives the 'insider's view': what Malinowski called "their view about their world" (1922). The interpretations, on the other hand, offer the outsiders' comment. This comment, as said, identifiable from the ethnographic text, aims at mutual understanding. It is *programmatic* in the sense that, rather than claiming insight and pretending to solve problems of communication, it explores the conditions of reaching a way of communication. What should we know about them and about ourselves, to understand one another?

6.

The book starts with a reference to our multi-cultural society. It admits the possibility of

3. Once, when the author thought to give some good advice, he got this reply as a kind of corrective reaction: "Tuan, mono koame", signifying in that context: 'We also think' in the sense of: 'please do not underestimate us'. (p. vi).

experiencing 'manhood' in different ways. This brings the authors to the core question: if I meet a representative of another 'type' of man, for what should I beware, what kind of questions should I pose in order to establish a good contact? This programmatic question far exceeds the specific interpretations. It is true: our generation would use other phrasings, we would endeavour other interpretations, and we would cherish other expectations. Recent reflections on stressing political dimensions in ethnography (*The politics of ethnographic reading and writing*, Driessen 1993, as well as 'political', e.g. colonial politics) may render attempts to psychologise mentalistic. Nowadays, a comparison referring to 'aspects of *humanum*' (p. 297) may seem too abstract, recalling the once usual concept of 'cultural universals'. However, when focussing on intercultural communication (a phenomenon both societal and individual), attention to psychological and universal aspects remains imperative.

Moreover, the general approach used by the authors leads to insights and to questions, which easily fit into recent developments in anthropology. The way in which they compare the Yahray with 'us' (that is: with representatives of western culture) not only approaches findings of what is now called 'reflexive anthropology'. It also is in line with a way of research that may be characterised as a 'confrontation' of cultures.

This strategy of representation implies the designation of an opposition between 'we' and 'they'. Some recent discourses of Otherness, especially those reacting against structuralistic or functionalistic ways of 'smoothing down' cultural differences, in this way try to trace differences that are small or insignificant in the eyes of outsiders, but very meaningful to insiders. Of course these approaches, although at first sight they seem to stress the exotic, are far from classical exoticist oppositions. Classical exoticism, which is still very much alive today, stresses differences as such, for opposition's sake. It does not explain anything, on the contrary, it only stresses how 'incomprehensible' and 'spectacularly strange' the Other is.

The strategy of designing contrasts on the one hand points the attention to differences which otherwise may be overlooked, and focuses on an attempt to understand which meaning people themselves attach to their cultural expressions, discovered in this way. On the other hand, this strategy also points the attention to the *forms* these expressions adopt. Thus, attention not only is paid to contents and meaning, but also to formal or generic dimensions (explicitly: see e.g. p. 205, 289). Nowadays this 'contrast'-strategy usually aims at symbolic dimensions, at contextualisation, and at relating the 'elevated' aspects of culture with common, 'every day'-aspects. Interpretation consists of combining a great variety of sources, historical as well as contemporary, that can be found within the society.

For their comparison the authors in this book made use of a limited number of a priori conceived parameters. However, the wealth of ethnographic details offered here, very well admits re-interpretation along the lines sketched above.

As noted before, what the authors call a comparison of 'parameters of being human', resembles the 'contrast'-strategy. This is perhaps due to the dualistic nature of their comparison and the selection of the criteria, rather than to a deliberate strategy. Nevertheless, their approach results in touching prominent questions of today's anthropology. We should note this because otherwise the language used in this book, at times somewhat outdated, can easily distract the reader's attention from the fundamental merits of this book. Without doubt, the authors keep themselves far from colonial discourses about Otherness which pretend to make the Other transparent. As said, they try to understand the other culture and the other's way of thinking, to get a better

understanding of what is necessary for inter-cultural communication. This approach leads them to aspects of human life which are at the heart of much recent 'experimental' ethnography (cf. Van de Port 1998). Matters like the different use of the senses in different cultures (Stoller 1989), the ways the Yahray re-live and perform the past, and the use of the body in expressing 'the mind', to mention only a few examples.

Their work is a real 'humane' ethnography, fully in the sense of today's meaning: it is primarily devoted to men, to people, but also (in a reflexive way), to Man(kind).

7.

As said, a classic but enduring position of ethnography within anthropology is closely linked to the way it is perceived as source for continuous re-interpretation. Of course, the possibilities of re-interpretation depend on the quality of the individual ethnography, on its form as well as its contents. Next to the author's own interpretations, which are very interesting in themselves, as well as in respect to late-colonial views, the text also fully admits recent interpretations related to the study of representation as well as the study of inter-cultural communication (see e.g. Hall, c.s. 1997). In the first place, we think of semantic analyses or deconstruction-analyses directed to discover ways in which people construct their meaningful world. The narrative material offered in this book is extremely rich. Next, the book is an apt source for performance-analysis, aiming at insight in the *effects* of the people's behaviour in relation to their ideas and symbolic representations (compare Kratz 1994). In this respect too, the book far exceeds functionalist or structuralist 'modern' approaches. Ample attention is paid to cognitive, conative, as well as to emotional dimensions. The fusion of these dimensions contributes to a dynamic representation needed for a performance-approach. This is only to indicate, in line with the former paragraphs, some possible approaches that can add value to the author's own views.

Because of his exceptional intimate knowledge of Yahray ways of life and thinking, and because of his orientation to Yahray thinking, Father Boelaars could offer an ethnography that also for us, 'post-modern' anthropologists, is of great value. Referring to the above statements about the ideal of 'timeless' description, we may indeed call his work 'timeless' in the sense of multi-interpretability.

8.

Next to the importance of this ethnography as *ethnography*, exploring questions of great concern and topicality, the book can be considered an important historical document. Especially where the authors engage in matters of cultural change, the book offers a good view on how people who experienced colonial and post-colonial times, tried to approach this subject. Boelaars extensively describes how the Yahray experienced the great changes from the 'Old Time' to the 'New Time'. He himself calls it a "disadvantage" that his research took place among former head-hunters, influenced by Christianity as well as by colonial government. However, at the same time it is an "advantage" that these people themselves experienced the Old Time, while also being able to describe their experiences of the transformation to the New Time. Boelaars' description is characterised by a careful differentiation of various sub-groups like men, women, and children. Also the missionary's view is offered frankly. This enables the reader to validate interpretations. On the other hand, it provides the book with an extra dimension as a source for colonial thinking (see Fabian 1986). Noteworthy is the way in which the author pays attention to differences between Yahray and missionary (Western) views. His non-evaluative representation significantly adds to the differentiation, which stresses the 'poly-

phonic' character of the ethnography. It is clear that this aspect of multiple views also adds to the significance of the book, as a source for colonial history.

In this respect we should also point at the prominent attention that is paid to trans-cultural analysis, mainly by Mr. Blom, in the *intermezzi*. These parts, which are reflexive as well as interpretative, also shed some light on contemporary expectations and comparative notions, sometimes anticipating the dualistic 'opposition'.

9.

The ethnography consists of two parts. Part one is devoted to "The Olden Times". It informs about the mythical past, the construction of Yahray world-view, gender-relations, 'individual in society', and the recent past. Much attention is paid to the theme 'growing up in Yahray society'. The aim of this ethnography is not - as specified above - to repeat earlier publications of the research, like *Head-hunters about Themselves* (1981) and several books in Dutch, but to represent the Yahray "way of being Man" from their own words and actions. The author starts from a "new reflection", realising that peoples living so close to nature approach reality in another way than 'modern people'. It is this perspective that opened the way to an anthropology of the senses, to interpretative anthropology starting from the people's 'own voices' and to a kind of reflexive anthropology. Thus, the authors anticipate on approaches that only became widely used in the last decade of the twentieth century. Next to extensive 'tales' about the origin of the Yahray, about the mutual discovery of man and woman, there are reflexive and interpretative parts about subjects like the environment for the Yahray, about social relations and institutions, about authority, and about the division of labour. Singing and dancing are the most prominent expressions of mutual alliance because they evoke a sense of festivity. This character is evident in the texts, which also reflect attention to the specific characteristics of persons and things (p. 63, 64; see also Piot 1999). Singing and rhythm render, in a surprising way, the duality in unity that penetrates many aspects of Yahray life (p. 64). Unity also extends to the unusual and the secret. All these aspects unite the Yahray with their world, and they continuously have to assess their position to co-habitants. This is expressed in a variety of stories, as presented in the ethnography.

The recent past, starting from the early twentieth century onwards is told in captivating personal stories. They express that offences to the pattern of life characterised by sharing and retaliation, is a reason for killing. Killing for revenge usually happens between villages. After this, groups separate again and return to their own possessions. Villages that are on friendly terms celebrate together. Yahray women too defend their own rights, using weapons as well.

Killing is never at random, it is related to offences to the *adat* or to authority. Sadistic acts are unknown. Killing and headhunting take place under the authority of leaders and depend on their 'relations' (p. 81, see also Boelaars 1981: 136). According to the Yahray worldview, people contribute to the continuity of life in various ways. Relations, also those of revenge and subsequent peacemaking, fit into that pattern. The stories that tell about their worldview shed much light on their way of thinking, in which, next to language, images play an important role. Thinking, including abstractions, is supported by behaviour. Interpretations of Yahray thinking make up an important theme in the book. Most important is that these interpretations are not 'mentalistic' like in much mid-century cognitive anthropology, structuralism, or the so-called New Ethnography. They rest on 'thick' description (Geertz 1973), paying attention to both

contents and *form*. As indicated above, it is this generic quality in voicing the people's words, that makes the book an important contribution, not only to Papua ethnography, but also to ethnography in general. The narrative dimension that is so characteristic for this ethnography dominates descriptions of various aspects of the life-cycle as well as of institutions which are difficult to understand in terms of 'our' (western) way of thinking, like revenge and head-hunting. Thus, it is not restricted to the 'exotic'. Socialisation, including normative and ideal "Advice", as well as current behaviour have been presented in this narrative way, enabling the interpreter to analyse the relationship between normative and 'real' aspects of life from within. Concerning this, it is noteworthy that Boelaars' narrative ethnography also offers many *imponderabilia* of current life (Malinowski 1922).

Surely, inter-village relations are an important part of the ethnography, both because of the issue of head-hunting and because of social-cultural changes after pacification and conversion. Head-hunting has often been described from the viewpoint of cultural dynamics or from the perspective of worldview. This ethnography also pays attention to these aspects of head-hunting. In addition, and referring to the central question, the reader is also informed about mental and emotional dimensions of this institution. The very strong emotions (of fear during battles and joy during feasts) which are deeply thrilling are as much a part of head-hunting, as social-cultural dimensions are. One chapter carries the intriguing title: "Head-hunting for the sake of head-hunting".

Head-hunting as a functional approach says, is essential for various kinds of relationships. Heads function in the termination of the period of mourning, in children's initiation, in confirming marriages, in recognising the relation between the killer and the one who performs the act of decapitating, and, finally, in honouring the main head-hunters as the Old Suns (p. 149). Besides, as this book shows, head-hunting is closely related to socially based emotions. To give a general impression, Boelaars relates e.g. the case of Togompatu, which is also given in *Head-hunters* (see Boelaars 1981: 136-144). In *Mono Koame*, in a chapter entitled "The Raid" (XVII, 165ff.), Boelaars extensively pays attention to the recollections of the Yahray themselves as they relate these in songs. Explanations precede verbatim texts, because without elucidation it is difficult for the outsider to understand the texts. This chapter offers a fine example of the narrative dimension, which is so important for performance-analysis. It also gives an impressive image of emotions involved. A text like this in particular raises *Mono Koame* far above common functional interpretation. The same applies to the detailed narrative information about the various social-cultural aspects related to head-hunting (e.g. in chapter XVIII and XIX, p. 181ff.; see *Head-hunters* chapter XII for a concise account): termination of mourning, affirmation of marriage, initiation, etc. Chapter XIX reports the festivities as celebrated by the villages together. Following these mainly narrative chapters is a so-called *Intermezzo*, called "Courage to be". This interpretative part too contains several characteristics of what today is called performance-analysis. Besides the already mentioned social-cultural aspects, it relates head-hunting to socialisation, to gender-positions, to Yahray reconstruction of the past, and to symbolism. Head-hunting cannot be isolated from culture, nor from the continuous flow of daily life. Also in this *Intermezzo*, the psychological interpretation is not confined to a mentalistic account, but also pays attention to language: to stylistic forms, rhetoric, and humour as part of daily life. The relations between the peoples involved are characterised in terms of culture and mentality.

The second part of the book has been devoted to the New Time. This is the time of great changes, related to pacification and conversion. These changes gradually transformed Yahray ways of thinking and acting. The authors aim at demonstrating where the New has been accepted and where the Old has remained, in an attempt "to reach an idea how these people have come to experience their being human, and how we could meet them, even among us." (p. 209). This changing experience of being human had much to do with their changing worldview. At first, pacification of the Marind offered new opportunities to the Yahray, who for some time could extend their area for head-hunting up the Digul-river. They also endeavoured going to the coast to trade iron axes. Most important, of course, were cognitive and affective changes in worldview, affecting the conative. The transformation to the New Time is related in terms of the people's own experiences as expressed in stories told by some Yahray, as well as by 'outsiders', like a Keiese teacher/officer (e.g. p. 221) and missionaries (e.g. p. 224). Boelaars points at the possibility that younger people could have transformed the old tales under influence of the new conditions (p. 220).

The alternation of 'tales' by those who experienced the Old Age and the transformation to the New Time with the ones told by others, like the missionaries, offers a very lively image of the period of change, deeply affecting the life of Papuan peoples. At the same time, this 'polyphonic' part of the book really is an authentic document concerning the final phase of the colonial period, offering an in-context description of expectations and experiences of the various actors on this scene. Historical information is sometimes offered in the 'ethnographic present', at times in staccato-style (e.g. p. 217, 228, 232), enhancing the vividness of the narrative, connecting authentic tales or indicating the use of other sources. Interesting is the (very limited) use of focalisation, a style common in colonial sources (e.g. p. 232).

Chapter XXIII (p. 237) is about the Indonesian period, from 1963 onwards. Although the contents are more 'documentary' in character, the style much resembles that of the preceding three chapters. Only Yahray voices disappear due to the way this part of history has been constructed. After 1960 Boelaars shifted his research from the Yahray to the Mandobo.

10.

This ethnography may be considered a main contribution, not only to Papua-ethnography, but also to Melanesian ethnography in general. Melanesia is justifiably renowned for being culturally and linguistically the most diverse region on earth. It constitutes the most complicated ethnographic scene, including one-quarter of the world's languages and many more traditional small-scale religions. Therefore, as Knauff rightfully indicates, Melanesia's incredible cultural diversity becomes all the more significant for a field that is dedicated to exploring contemporary notions of difference. "If one is interested in the mixing and blending of identities, or in a culture as a dialogue or tension between different voices, a world area that has so many of the world's languages and associated cultures is of particular interest and importance" (Knauff 1999: 243).

Starting in the 1920s and 1930s with legendary anthropologists such as W.H.R. Rivers, Bronislaw Malinowski, Margaret Mead, and Gregory Bateson, Richard Thurnwald, or Maurice Leenhardt (see in respect also to this book: Clifford 1982), the region has a distinctive place in the history of anthropology. Up till the present day Melanesian studies have been at the forefront of anthropology's modernist contributions. A surprising number of anthropological theories were and still are formulated with reference to Melanesian studies. Most outstanding are subjects like gender, political economy, and the so-called 're-invention of tradition'. Also what Knauff signalled as 'post-modern' insights providing a generative theory of indigenous

social and symbolic development (Knauff 1985, 1993: x, 3-41). Because of its content, as well as because of its generic form, *Mono Koame* lends itself to re-interpretations that fit very well new fields of research, like those indicated by Knauff (1999), and Sillitoe (1998).

What has been said about the importance of Melanesia in relation to anthropological research equally applies to the sub region in which Boelaars' and Blom's monograph is situated: the South coast of Western New Guinea. The range and quality of information concerning the various language/culture areas of this part of the world are, as Knauff (1993: 35) also recognises, impressive: most of the region's constituent language/culture areas were subject to intensive ethnographic study.⁴

Yet he also observes that the richness of this impressive ethnography stems primarily from the (early) colonial period. After that period there was a decline in published studies about the development of the South coast cultures (see also below). This decline, he concludes, contrasts with the intensive earlier ethnographic attention, "and it greatly deserves to be remedied (1993: 35-37). Also in this respect it is more than worthwhile to make Boelaars' and Blom's manuscript available for publication.

Last but not least, the importance of the ethnographic material presented in *Mono Koame* lies in its value it might have - as we already indicated above - for present day Malesians, who like people everywhere else in the Pacific, are self-consciously drawing upon representations of tradition in their negotiations in the regional, national, and even global arena. It makes, as Knauff (1999: 244) writes, the effective use of Melanesianists' ethnographic record all the more relevant and important for contemporary assessment. The present challenge for Melanesian anthropology, as for Melanesian themselves, is to recontextualise traditions of cultural distinction in a period of self-avowed modernity (ibid.13). This creative process recognises not only the diversity of cultures but also assumes that cultural forms will always be made, unmade, and remade, and that people constantly contemplate human alternatives (Clifford 1988; 2001). Communities can and must reconfigure themselves, drawing selective on remembered past. *Mono Koame* offers a valuable documentation and interpretation of that past. As noted before, Boelaars' translation of Yahray narratives closely followed generic qualities. Notwithstanding this, the translation is always in itself a transformation and interpretation. However, this is not necessary an essential problem. As the authors themselves intensively experienced the local context, their transformation can very well reach the one constructed by the informants themselves, who, indeed, also are always interpreting and transforming their narratives, whenever they perform these (see White, 1991: 47).

11.

From the very first contacts with peoples from the South coast of former Dutch New Guinea, missionaries showed a great interest in the cultures and cosmologies of those peoples. We find the results of this interest manifest in various forms: ethnographic texts, but also photographs and ethnographic objects. Missionaries like Drabbe, Geurtjens, Van de Kolk, Meuwese, Verschueren, Vertenten, and Zegwaard contributed in many respects and over a long period to

4. By the way: here it may be appropriate to quote Knauff concerning the work of those who laid the foundations of the ethnography of the South coast of Papua: "My greatest acknowledgement is to the intrepid ethnographers who produced such detailed studies of this region during early decades of ethnographic research. Their timely commitment to extended fieldwork was extraordinary and carried out under logistical conditions that are difficult to fully appreciate from our late twentieth-century vantage point." (1993: x)

the ethnography of the Southern part of New Guinea (see e.g. Cornelissen 1988 for a very brief outline, also about the relationships between missionaries and ethnologists and civil servants. See also Jaarsma 1990 and 1991 for a much more acceptable view). Later on, their work has been continued, also by government officials and professional anthropologists among them. Compared to other regions, the relationship between missionaries and anthropologists in New Guinea seems to have been a special one. Jaarsma tried to trace this, what he called "fairly complex situation", through a "continuous timeframe" (2000: 29). Jaarsma noted an exchange of knowledge between missionaries and administrators within the local context. However, contrary to professional anthropologists-administrators the missionaries did not publish their findings regularly. Exceptions to this were the professionally trained missionaries, Protestant and Catholic, like Boelaars, Bromley, or Kamma. Summarising, one can conclude that missionary ethnography about Southwest New Guinea played an important part in the formation of the ethnographic tradition concerning this area. The leading anthropologist Jan van Baal not only introduced or edited several publications by missionaries (e.g. Van Baal ed. 1982), but fully acknowledged their contribution to his main work *Dema* (1966). We may even consider *Dema* to be a 'secondary ethnography'. All this had to do with the fact that starting from the middle of the twentieth century onwards, ethnographic knowledge on New Guinea was 'on a premium' and was gathered from every source available (Jaarsma 1990, 1991). Until the end of his life, Van Baal always stressed the importance of what he called 'the white spots on the ethnographic map of New Guinea', in that way expressing his preoccupation with that subject (see also de Ruijter & Wolf 1993).

In this context, Father Boelaars could play a special role, because he received permission to finish a thesis, after having completed his training as an anthropologist (University of Utrecht). Thus, he was a missionary as well as a professional anthropologist. His thesis was about the linguistic position of Southwest New Guinea (1950). Starting in 1951 Father Boelaars did long-term anthropological fieldwork. This made his position in relation to the anthropological community at large a special one.

Relations between missionaries and anthropologists were rather strained at times (Bonsen et.al. 1990; Borsboom & Kommers 2000). Sometimes this has been explained by referring to stereotypes, emanating from a kind of jealousy or professional arrogance (see Van der Geest 1987). On the one hand, anthropologists had to admit that the missionaries' possibilities concerning fieldwork were superior to their own. Indeed, many anthropologists entered the field via missionary establishments. On the other hand, missionary ethnography often was considered leading to estrangement (Van der Geest 1987: 1). Sometimes, this idea was not quite incorrect. It even stimulated missionary-anthropologists, as the famous Father Schebesta at the end of his life, to criticise the missionary endeavour vehemently. Often the anthropologist's fear rather resulted from confrontations with missiological ideas than from missionary ethnography. Moreover, changing ideas about professionalising fieldwork and about disciplinary conventions concerning writing (representation, see e.g. Abbink 1990) contributed to stereotyping.

To appreciate Boelaars' special position, it may be of interest to pay some attention to the subject of fieldwork itself. As said, many missionaries by far surpassed the possibilities of most professional anthropologists concerning (the duration of their) fieldwork. Since Malinowski (1922), fieldwork characterised by participant observation became the current method of anthropology. However, fieldwork hardly ever took more than a year. By the end of the nineteenth century, it was still usual to receive 'data' from the field by means of correspondence with colonial civil servants, or with missionaries. A guide like *Notes and Queries in*

Anthropology (1874, several later editions) is a testimony to this. At the same time, experiential authority gained a higher status in ethnography. In fact, it already received much prestige during the 18th century, when travel literature as generic form for scientific description flourished (Stewart 1978). The main problem of these 'travels' (which also affected the *voyages philosophiques*) was the issue of the 'arbitrary moment'. That meant that the moment of observing a social phenomenon nearly always was arbitrary to the phenomenon observed. For instance, a traveller could reach a place at the time that a marriage ceremony was going on. The next day he had to continue his journey, thus only being able to observe the ceremony, but missing what preceded and what followed the occurrence. More or less the same problem struck expeditions. This 'method' reached also a climax during the second half of the 18th century. After a period of regression, expeditions as a way of studying exotic peoples regained importance during the late 19th century. Especially from the perspective of ethnographic research this approach also remained important during the first decades of the twentieth century. The sub-title of Malinowski's famous ethnography about the Trobriand that laid the foundation for the so-called field-work method, contains reminiscences of this period of travel and expedition (see also Van Maanen 1988: 68; about 'travel' as adventure, see the ironic qualification of travelling by Lévi-Strauss, 1955: 13). Apart from the fact that Malinowski contributed much to the formation of ethnography as a scientific genre (in particular the realist narrative), he also set standards about 'doing fieldwork'. It became widely accepted that this fieldwork-period should encompass at least a year. The year-cycle, as it - ethnocentrically - was known, became the standard. However, in many respects this notion remained problematic. For instance, that time usually proved to be too short to become well versed in the local language; the year cycle proved arbitrary to the life cycle, and so on. Especially in this respect, missionaries, who as a rule spent many years in one place, definitively beat professional anthropologists. However, their knowledge of 'the natives' as a rule served their duty to converse people, thus 'estranging' them from their culture. Even in some methodological works produced by missionaries the priority of conversion is stated explicitly (see e.g. Wolff 1920; Steenbergen 1932). Therefore anthropologists had the idea that they were more sympathetic to local customs, aiming at recording these in their 'original forms', rather than aiming at changing them (see Trouwborst 1990).

Another genre that headed anthropologists off was the popularising of field experiences by missionaries, who tried to inform Christians at home. However, as far as literature about New Guinea is concerned, many of these books do have a serious ethnographic core. Therefore, within the atmosphere characterising the colonial administration in the mid-century, these texts were appreciated. They were considered valuable sources in addition to the scientific texts, produced by men like Boelaars and Drabbe. As a professional anthropologist, Boelaars was well versed in the (realistic) descriptive tradition initiated by Malinowski and Evans-Pritchard. Therefore, his work was very accessible to lay-men, as well as to professional anthropologists. At that particular period in the ethnography of New Guinea, this was also the case with the 'popular' descriptions. Prolonged and close contact with the people not only offered missionaries the opportunity to develop a profound knowledge of local languages, which enabled them to reproduce myths, life histories, and the like in verbatim form, retaining original generic forms. It also enabled them to get historical insights superior to those anthropological fieldworkers could reach (who, therefore, inclined to synchronic studies in the so-called ethnographic present, see e.g. Miedema 1990). Thus, Boelaars wrote a trilogy *Met Papoea's samen op weg* (1991, 1995, 1997) and paid a lot of attention to processes of transformation, like he does in this book.

After colonialism, professional (Dutch) attention for the area decreased. Missionaries remained the only ones who continued to collect ethnographic insight. However, there are several reasons why their influence in professional circles waned. As far as the Dutch missionaries are concerned, many of their works have not been translated, and therefore remained inaccessible for an international audience. Perhaps the 'popular' image attributed to this. Moreover, after the Dutch left, possibilities to publish about this particular area also decreased when New Guinea sank behind the European horizon and several specific series or periodicals ceased to exist (Jaarsma 2000). Also, professional ethnography became more and more inaccessible to 'lay people', because of exclusive theories that came to dominate ethnography. When new approaches like those of Cultural Studies and Post-modern thinking touched Melanesian ethnography, (realist) works like Boelaars' *Head-hunters about Themselves*, once prominent in the regional scientific tradition, tended to disappear from the sight of those who did not specialise on Papua. What seems even more regrettable is that those works that remained inaccessible for non-Dutch readers, tended to become forgotten altogether in the international scene. This is a big loss. The more, because those recent approaches pose questions about and focus attention to aspects of human life that would very well fit those works, many of which may be called experimental ethnographies *avant la lettre*, excelling in humane qualities and seeming to join so nicely the current quest for narrative ethnography.

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