

This notwithstanding, the relationship between state, capital, bossism, coercion and crime has been well-taken, and is strengthened through opening up a perspective on its prevalence in comparable countries, such as Thailand.

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Deborah B. Gewertz and Frederick K. Errington, *Emerging class in Papua New Guinea; The telling of difference*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, x + 179 pp. ISBN 0.521.65567.6. Price: GBP 14.95.

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With this book Gewertz and Errington continue their analysis of the macro-sociology of contemporary Papua New Guinea. Earlier instalments were *Twisted histories, altered contexts: representing the Chambri in a world system* (1991) and *Articulating change in the 'Last Unknown'* (1995). The three books make most commendable reading, especially in conjunction with each other. Another study may be forthcoming since the authors plan to research the Ramu sugar industry.

Gewertz had first carried out fieldwork among the Chambri, in the Sepik plain; Errington among the Karavarans, in the Duke of York islands. With their more recent research they deal with the wider social system of which Chambri and Karavarans are now a part, most of them as inhabitants of what have become rural backwaters or of urban squatter settlements. The book under review deals with class relations as Gewertz and Errington could observe them in 1996 in Wewak, the capital of East Sepik Province, then a city of about 50,000 people including a number of Chambri. While this topic is novel as far as Papua New Guinea is concerned, the research strategy the authors followed is largely a traditional anthropological one: they focused on a series of case studies complemented by the results of 88 formal interviews. In addition, however, they were tutoring at a private school which brought them into contact with children of many of their middle-class research collaborators.

The analytic concepts they apply to their data are mainly classic sociological ones. Following Max Weber, they view classes as distinguished not only by their ways of production but also by their consumption capacities, and following the historian E.P. Thompson they view class relations as fluid and hence irreducible to a rigid class structure. They describe the emergence of such relations as a transformation away from what they refer to as the 'strenuous egalitarianism' prevailing among the male members of most New

Guinean societies. In my view there was more social inequality in these societies than the authors suggest. However, the novel forms of inequality that Gewertz and Errington call 'incommensurable', in view of the sharp differences in lifestyle and earning capacities, are a post-colonial phenomenon in Papua New Guinea. They have come about despite statements around the time the country became independent that these forms of social inequality were not to emerge.

Gewertz and Errington deal primarily with what they call the Wewak 'middle class', a group of leading public servants and professionals, partly Papua New Guineans, partly expatriates. The international composition of this group reflects the multinationality of the capitalist system of which it forms a part. So far very few Papua New Guineans form part of the upper class of this system. With the case studies the authors want to present a composite picture of class relations. They discuss people on both sides of the class divide. On the one side there are the members of the Wewak Rotary club, the Sepik Women in Trade (an association set up by middle-class women ostensibly to promote handicraft production by lower-class women), and the Wewak Resort and Country Club, alias the Golf Club; on the other, people living in the Wewak squatter settlements and attempting, in vain, to break through the newly emerged class barriers.

During their fieldwork, Gewertz and Errington associated primarily with members of the Papua New Guinea middle class. They rented accommodation in a middle-class suburb, played golf, attended Rotary functions, hosted the people they interviewed, and so on. Although they employed a 'security person', and later two, their house was twice broken into and personal effects were stolen. At the same time, they made special efforts to maintain mutually satisfactory reciprocal relations with their lower-class friends and collaborators – apparently more than did most of their New Guinean middle-class counterparts. And they are frank about the mutual frustrations which some of their efforts entailed.

Gewertz and Errington write that they had hoped that the pre-colonial egalitarianism of Papua New Guinea could remain in existence in the post-colonial era. But what seems to bother them particularly is the way in which middle-class New Guineans argue that their privileges are deserved, because they descend from a line of 'chiefs', because they are clever, or because they have been especially diligent, implying that lower-class status is equally deserved and overlooking the advantages they have enjoyed as the children of salaried parents, growing up in towns with a privileged schooling and much exposure to the English language.