

Mac Marshall, ed., *Through a Glass Darkly: Beer and Modernization in Papua New Guinea*. Boroko, Papua New Guinea: Institute of Applied Social and Economic Research, 1982. Pp. xxiii, 482, tables, appendices, bibliography, glossary. PNG K15.00.

In recent decades Melanesian anthropology has been challenged to demonstrate how research provides practical payoff for those we study. This volume, with contributions by nearly forty different writers, is the heftiest response to date and goes some distance toward showing what anthropologists have to say about practical problems facing contemporary Papua New Guineans.

The question of alcohol use is bound to be controversial, and it is probably for this reason as much as any other that so little has been written about the topic in Papua New Guinea. Discussions of alcohol seem inevitably to conjure lurid visions of drunkenness and dissolute behavior. In Western history alcohol abuse epitomizes our sense of social evil, and often becomes part of arguments concerning moral decay, class oppression, and so on. As a social issue, drinking is unavoidably political. This is all the more true in the Third World where it is enmeshed in histories of colonial domination.

Alcohol has always played a part in the colonial situation. Sale of alcohol to aboriginal peoples in much of North America and Australia is synonymous with exploitation and symbolizes the subversion of indigenous society at the hands of outsiders. At the same time, the use of alcohol often served to segregate the colonizers from the colonized. V. G. Kiernan, a historian of colonialism, has argued that the nineteenth-century empires could not have been won except at the cost of pervasive alcoholism among administrators and colonial officials. This was symptomatic of elite status as defined by luxury consumption and social isolation in exotic locales. It is thus not surprising that legislation restricting sale of alcoholic beverages to local people in colonial territories had an inherently ambiguous nature: envisaged by many (especially missionaries) as a measure protecting local people from some of civilization's ills, it also smacked of paternalism while establishing what were effectively sumptuary laws on a par with those forbidding the use of European clothing. In such circumstances alcohol is at once emblematic of danger, power, and prestige, a character it retains in the contemporary Pacific scene.

In Papua New Guinea prohibition of alcohol sales to local people was a morally offensive token of colonialism, especially to a growing indigenous urban elite. Lifting this ban in the 1960s was seen as a signpost toward parity with expatriates and is a major public symbol of political independence. It is thus no exaggeration to say that the use of alcohol in Papua New Guinea carries with it overtones not only of modernity but of emancipation as well, and for this reason it remains important in the ideology of nationhood. But if this is so, there is nonetheless public concern with problems popularly thought to be associated with the use of alcohol. It is here that the collective results of ethnography have something to contribute, and the essays in this collection provide what must surely be the most comprehensive coverage of alcohol use for any comparable region in the world.

As is to be expected from a collection this large and covering such a diverse area, the resultant overall picture is complex. Despite this, how-

ever, some consistent patterns emerge. Many of these are detailed in the conclusion by Marshall, Piau-Lynch, and Sumanop. One of these is the near-universal perception of alcohol as a commodity whose consumption carries with it associations of luxury, sophistication, and success. As such, it is particularly appropriate as a vehicle for expressions of self-esteem and achievement of modernity. At the same time it is also neatly fitted into more traditional attitudes associated with prestige, production, and festivity; here beer serves as a ceremonial gift in largely public settings. Drinking in these contexts seems to encourage both conviviality and contention, but the general pattern suggests that the presence of the community as a whole serves to limit unruly behavior. Though the picture remains complicated, particularly with regard to private drinking and domestic violence, it would seem that many of the behavioral problems we associate with drinking are more likely to become acute in circumstances of alienation and atomization.

Traditional economies of Papua New Guinea place a premium on distribution rather than accumulation, and increased involvement in the cash economy suits beer especially well to a role in local prestige transactions. A number of papers demonstrate the ways in which ceremonial exchanges of alcoholic beverages mediate between the cash economy and the prestige economy. This is particularly true of the central highlands where the prosperity of the coffee boom often gets channelled into extensive collective presentations, liquidating large cash accumulations while transforming them into social debts and credits. Here it seems clear that the Western ideal of capital accumulation takes a back seat to the purchase of luxury commodities such as beer and imported foods. One implication of this is that purchases of beer for distribution may come to motivate cash-crop production while discouraging the emergence of permanent class differences, raising the issue of the relation between local values and the cash economy. Although such questions are not resolved in the collection as a whole, they receive good coverage throughout the set. Here the book makes a major contribution to our knowledge of the impact of money on rural economies in Papua New Guinea.

One of the book's strengths is that it goes out on a limb and offers concrete policy recommendations concerning the availability of alcohol in rural areas. A number of these are likely to be contentious, but they have the virtue of being clearly phrased and based upon a sober analysis of a broad range of empirical material. The book's weaknesses are relatively minor and are mainly sins of omission. A stronger analysis of the role of missions would seem called for since alcohol has always been near the top of the list of missionary concerns for local welfare. Given the fact that al-

cohol often found its way into the lives of local people through expatriates, a closer look at European drinking patterns is also appropriate (here Poole's paper stands out), The fact that beer is a near-proverbial feature of town life whets one's appetite for a promised volume on alcohol in urban settings. Finally, a book this size deserves an index to help the reader through so many different pieces. All of these complaints merely serve to underscore the fact that this collection addresses a need that we have only barely began to satisfy, and we should all hope to see more work of this kind in the future.

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