

Jane and James Ritchie, *Growing Up in Polynesia*. Boston: George Allen and Unwin, 1979. Pp. 176, map, references, index. \$13.50. Paperback \$6.95.

When Bougainville and Cook descended on the islands of Polynesia, Europe was just ripe to receive the news that an earthly Eden had been discovered. Whether these explorers meant to confirm this or not is another matter. Eighteenth and nineteenth century Europeans saw the islanders the way they wanted to see them, alternatively as the noble and as the ignoble savage.

“Because notions of noble and ignoble savagery among non-Europeans are so basic to Western views of the world, and because these views in turn originate in and are worked out through the Judeo-Christian tradition, it is not surprising that they continue to turn up, in however muted a form, in the twentieth century” (Daws 1977: 181). Today, most anthropologists have banished such ideas from their minds. But because there is no worse insult to an anthropologist than a blatant accusation of cultural bias, let us give the question more perspective: can an outside observer be free from all cultural or theoretical models in describing another culture? Can he or she discard every bit of his or her psychological and academic conditioning in the analysis, for instance, of a topic as bound to be taken personally as socialization in a target culture?

What the Ritchies attempt to give, though as “emic” a view of Polynesian socialization as possible, is a proof that one can get very close to a positive answer. For that, they discard the surprisingly common strategy of developing a theory and then looking at the data through it, “because we believed that socialization is not conducted in terms of the literature of child development but in terms of cultural goals” (p. 147). Thus, the temptation to see the topic through theoretical smoked glasses is avoided.

Growing up in Polynesia is an account of socialization practices in Polynesia—a broadly defined area, as it is made to include Fiji and Rotuma. It relies both on the literature, from Mead to Levy, and on the authors’ vast knowledge and experience in the field, particularly in New Zealand (see Beaglehole and Ritchie, 1958, for a summary of their most famous research). The book, however, is not intended to be a highly technical study which would have made it, like most of the literature in the field, unapproachable to the majority. Instead, both style and content, combined with comments made by the authors’ Polynesian students that preface each chapter, make it a very readable and enjoyable review both of the data available gleaned from the bookshelf and the field and of the current theories on child development in a Polynesian perspective.

The audience that the Ritchies are writing for is difficult to define with any precision. They indeed insist that their primary intention is to address Polynesians “as one kind of offering to their continuing celebration of living the Polynesian life” (p. 10). The intention is an admirable one yet, throughout the book one cannot help feeling that it is addressed to Westerners, or at least to very urbanized Pacific Islanders. Indeed, the Western model for a particular practice is frequently given before the Polynesian model. Obviously, and the Ritchies give us a virtuoso example of this, we need a framework of comparison when we want to describe a culture or anything else for that matter. Without comparison there is no

description. But when writing about Polynesians for Polynesians do we really need to refer constantly to a descriptive model?

The geographic area the Ritchies propose to cover is enormous. So is the cultural area. One can find a world of difference between the streets of Auckland and the isolated Marquesan valley, and even between an atoll of Tokelau or Tuvalu and a village on Savai'i. Yet, and the authors emphasize it repeatedly, there are strong similarities in the general socialization patterns everywhere in Polynesia and Fiji. This homogeneity is stressed by the set-up of the book itself. The first and most important parts of the book (Chapters 1-10) go through each stage of the process of growing up, from birth to young adulthood. The scenario will be familiar to every islander, or even to any reader of Mead. Born in an extremely warm, protective and loving environment, which surrounds it through infancy, the child is then led towards independence from the adult world at an early age, a process that was insightfully called "desatellization" by Ausubel (1977: 124-5). From this moment on, most of the socializing input comes from the peer group; this pattern will go on till adulthood is reached (the entering of adolescence being a very unobtrusive event) and will have an impact on the cultural attitudes towards such things as the meaning of achievement and sex roles.

However well-developed the overall argument is, a few points lack a bit of clarity. One such example is what happens at the stage when the young child is to shift his or her dependency and security needs from the parental figures onto the peer group. The Ritchies do not agree with certain authors who state that the child goes through a process of rejection on the part of the adults; this interpretation, they state, is culturally biased. Indeed, the Polynesian situation does not exhibit the characteristics of real rejection as one finds, for instance, in Belauan society (Barnett 1960: 6). Nor are the usual after effects of such a rejection characteristic of Polynesian cultures. What is then an alternative way of looking at the process Polynesian children go through? "Polynesian adults are not rejective--merely firm," the Ritchies propose (p. 53). This, however, is very unenlightening.

A more precise way of looking at early independence would be to posit it not triggered by rejection on the part of the adults, but by avoidance of adult presence on the part of the child. The child, at the appropriate age, will start avoiding the adult because the latter has gradually become more demanding, less flexible and certainly less enslaved to every one of the child's whims. The motivations for desatellization therefore do not stem directly from the adult, but from the child, and is therefore not as traumatic as one would expect, although temper tantrums and hunger

for a lost attention are far from being unknown in that age group (see Gerber 1975: 71-4 and Besnier 1979: 17). Secondly, this avoidance pattern carries right through into adulthood. One avoids getting oneself into a demanding or stressful situation. Keesing and Keesing (1956-79) give us the example of a young Samoan man asked to join a chief who could not swallow his food, and Ritchie and Ritchie report another in the context of schooling: "you withdraw from, you isolate yourself from, that which causes the failure" (p. 126).

One discussion the Ritchies develop very successfully concerns achievement goals in the Polynesian cultural context (Chapter 7). Indeed, numerous Western observers, educators, foreign aid officers and expatriates have been heard to deplore what they saw as a lack of motivation among Polynesians: "a lack of initiative and of personal dynamic on the learner's part is found throughout the Gilbert and Ellice Islands, with young and old alike" (Green 1974: 17). Although it will come as nothing new to most theoreticians, the context in which the achievement motivations have to be measured is invariably forgotten in those statements. At the level of the village, of the island or of the kin group, competition and achievement goals can be tremendous in Polynesia and motivate groups and sometimes individuals to undertake great tasks. One thinks of fish drives in atoll environments like Tuvalu, in which the competition can be ferocious, or, of women clearing whole villages of every bit of dirt in Tonga. On the other hand, there is a little ambition, understandably, to "succeed" in a Western sense, as such a success is invariably individualistic (as opposed to the Polynesian preference for group achievement), materialistic (which is of lesser relevance in a Polynesian context) and defined within a context that is foreign to Polynesia.

In the latter chapter of the volume, the problems associated with urbanization, migration, schooling, and cultural contacts are discussed. The excellent remarks made in these seem to concern mostly Polynesians in a Westernized environment. Hawaiians, urban Maoris and immigrant islanders will find their problems well discussed in these chapters, but on the whole they will have little immediate relevance to the outer-island Fijian, the Tuvaluan or the Tuamotuan, to whom pre-school and bilingual education do not mean much (at least for the time being). So, while the authors painstakingly try to cover the whole Polynesian area in their remarks, it is nevertheless obvious that the emphasis is on urbanized or semi-urbanized Polynesia, which is understandable given the research background of the authors.

One problem that would have deserved more attention is the language problem in education and in cross-cultural contacts. It does get mentioned

briefly on several occasions, but is never fully discussed. Basically, there seem to be two kinds of problems in the Polynesian area. One found in the more Westernized communities like Hawaii and New Zealand is created by the loss of the Polynesians' own register and the acquisition of a non-standard register of the dominant language (English), which stigmatize the speakers as sub-standard members of the dominant society. The other kind of problem is more likely to be found in more traditionalistic areas, such as the outer islands of many nations of the Pacific. There, the lack of exposure to the *lingua franca* of the country (English or French) limits the degree of fluency which can be attained by school children. As the whole educational system is based on this language it hinders their educational achievements. The effect of both situations can be devastating, not only on the practical side but also on the cultural and moral sides and on the individual's self-esteem. Bilingual education programs and, before all, recognition of the nature of the problems by the concerned authorities, certainly help a great deal in remedying them. But the root of the problem seems to be deeply nested in cultural attitudes both on the part of the dominant culture, if there is one, and of the Polynesians. No solution can, therefore, be expected to have magic results.

Perhaps the best aspect of the Ritchies' book is that the reader can get through it a good cross-cultural idea of what socialization is. Polynesian socialization is successfully put into a broader context of "growing up anywhere" without, on the other hand, falling into theorization. The Ritchies subtly define the accepted universals, pointing out those that do not apply to Polynesia (p. 155 for instance) and reinforcing those that do, thus building up an overview of what socialization is.

In conclusion, *Growing up in Polynesia* will never become another *Coming of Age in Samoa* or *We, the Tikopia* because its aims are very different. It is likely, however, to be one of the few books of its kind to secure a place on the Polynesian family bookshelf or in the school teacher's reference library. In that, it may be a much more valuable contribution to the study of developmental psychology in the Pacific than many of the volumes in the scholar's library. It is hoped that, following the Ritchies' example and the pace set by organizations like the Pacific Islanders' Educational Resource centre in New Zealand (Ioane et al. 1977), more materials of this kind will be developed in the future.

REFERENCES

- Ausubel, David P. 1977: *Maori Youth: A Psychoethnological Study of Cultural Deprivation*. Second American Edition. North Quincy: Christopher Publishing Company.

- Barnett, Homer G. 1960: *Being a Palauan*. Case studies in Cultural Anthropology. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Beaglehole, Ernest and James E. Ritchie 1958: "The Rakau Maori Studies." *J. of the Polynesian Society* (Wellington) 67: 132: 154.
- Besnier, Nicholas 1979: "Vava'u: An Ethnography of Psychological Enculturation." Stanford University, Department of Anthropology. Mimeo.
- Daws, Gavan 1977: "Looking at Islanders: European ways of thinking about Polynesians in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries." in: Richard W. Brislin (ed.), *Culture Learning: concepts, applications and research*, pp. 176-81. East-West Center Books. Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii.
- Gerber, Eleanor Ruth 1975: "The Cultural Patterning of Emotions in Samoa." Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Anthropology: University of California at San Diego.
- Green, Nigel 1974: "Curriculum and Culture in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands." *Pacific Islands Education* (Wellington) 62: 9-21.
- Iaone, Taulapapa-Sefulu I *et al.* 1977: *A Handbook for Teachers of Pacific Island Children*. Auckland: Pacific Islanders' Educational Resource Centre.
- Keesing, Felix M. and Mary M. Keesing 1956: *Elite Communication in Samoa: A Study in Leadership*. Stanford Anthropological Series no. 3. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Spindler, George D. 1973: "The Transmission of Culture." in: George D. Spindler (ed.), *Education and Cultural Process: Towards an Anthropology of Education*, pp. 279-310. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Nicholas Besnier
United States Peace Corp
Suva, Fiji