

Alice Pomponio, *Seagulls Don't Fly into the Bush: Cultural Identity and Development in Melanesia*. Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Publishing, 1992. Pp. xxvi, 242, maps, photos, figures, bibliography, index. US\$17.75 paper.

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Alice Pomponio's *Seagulls Don't Fly into the Bush* is a welcome addition to Wadsworth's recently introduced anthropological series. The Modern Anthropological Library series aims to acquaint students with the

breadth of modern cultural anthropology, and thus *Seagulls* is geared to the undergraduate audience. Through her use of lucid language and concise explanation of selected anthropological concepts, Pomponio succeeds in making the contemporary Melanesian experience accessible to readers.

Pomponio focuses her attention on the dilemma of development and change facing the Mandok Islanders of Papua New Guinea's Siassi Islands: Why do people who have excelled in the modern educational system fail so abysmally in the modern economic system? The origin of this dilemma, as well as its solution, lies in the Mandok self-image, cultural theme portrayed in the legend of Namor, the hero-trickster.

Namor traveled from New Guinea to the Siassis and to New Britain, and perhaps beyond. Wherever he went, he used knowledge to create artifacts: foods, objects, ceremonies, even people. He also created ties between people, relationships between groups. Knowledge the Mandok value; ties between groups they provide and exploit.

The Mandok are, and see themselves as, mobile maritime middlemen. Their small island offers no land base for gardening, and the land available to them on the larger island of Umboi cannot feed their rapidly growing population. They have adapted to their circumstances by becoming traders: They fish to exchange their catch for Umboi garden produce, and ply the Vitiaz and Dampier straits between New Guinea and New Britain to fuel their prestige exchange economy (Harding 1967). But the introduction of a cash economy, the demise of the two-masted Siassi voyaging canoes, and unreliable shipping schedules altered relations between the Mandok and their clients. Formerly the center of a web connecting peoples and cultures on New Britain and New Guinea, the Mandok (and other Siassi Islanders) now find themselves marginalized by a money economy predicated on cash crops. Pomponio explores Mandok attempts to maintain their cultural identity as mobile traders in the face of government attempts to convert them into smallholding agriculturalists. The Mandok self-image of the independent trader doomed those attempts to failure.

As Pomponio explains, the Mandok did not reject the imposed economic structure out-of-hand. Rather, they searched for the knowledge to participate on their own terms. Thus education came to play an important role in Mandok definitions of "development." During the immediate postwar decades, education provided access to employment and income. Parental investment in a child's education paid dividends in the form of remittances from educated and employed children. And the Mandoks' operative definition of development was access to cash. So

parents enthusiastically supported the local school. But the support dwindled as basic education became devalued in a marketplace flooded with highly educated people emerging from the expanding educational system. Paying for an education no longer produced a return. In their quest for "development," the Mandok, like the peripatetic hero Namor, moved on.

Pomponio chronicles a series of attempts to "develop" the Siassi communities. Government-backed development models, stressing cash cropping, proved ill-suited to a people without land, people who saw themselves as voyagers, not horticulturalists. Given an ethos where wealth derived its value from distribution rather than accumulation, trade stores collapsed. More recent, locally based attempts to "develop" have also encountered difficulties, many of which Pomponio connects back to Mandok social organization. She also documents one enterprise that, at least for the time being, has succeeded in a fashion acceptable to the islanders.

Seagulls Don't Fly into the Bush updates and complements Harding's *Voyagers of the Vitiaz Strait* (1967). By looking at a single island (one dare not use the word *community*) in the Siassi cluster, Pomponio illuminates the processes and motivations at work on an individual as well as group level. She reinforces the sense of change by avoiding that curious (and timeless) anthropological tense, the "ethnographic present."

The book's ethnographic strength is somewhat diminished by its abbreviated ethnology. The Siassi Islanders are, after all, the hinge in a far-flung trade system. The legend of Namor is not the only feature shared by those cultures and communities bound together through Siassi voyaging: A more extensive exploration and comparison of other levels and modes of cultural sharing and integration might have proved beneficial. But given the aims of the book and the intended market, *Seagulls* succeeds in providing a solid and coherent introduction to a fascinating Melanesian culture. By reiterating important questions about the nature and role of "development" and "education" in Papua New Guinea, Pomponio offers the newcomer to the field a firm grounding in issues of contemporary concern.

REFERENCE

- Harding, T. G.
1967 *Voyagers of the Vitiaz Strait: A Study of a New Guinea Trade System*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.