

the flexibility and dynamics of aesthetic and narrative genres, and with the dilemmas, emotions and strategies of people in transitional situations.

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Johszua Robert Mansoben, *Sistem politik tradisional di Irian Jaya, Indonesia; Studi perbandingan*. [http://www.papuaweb.org/dlib/s123/mansoben/\\_phd.html](http://www.papuaweb.org/dlib/s123/mansoben/_phd.html) [originally: PhD thesis, Leiden University, 1994]

ANTON PLOEG

Johszua Robert Mansoben was for a long time head of the anthropology department at Cenderawasih University, Jayapura. His comparative study of traditional political systems in western New Guinea (Irian Jaya, Papua), originally a Leiden University doctoral thesis in anthropology, is today a frequently accessed fixture of PapuaWeb, an internet information network hosted by the University of Papua, Cenderawasih University, and the Australian National University. A slightly revised version of Mansoben's thesis was published jointly by the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI) and Leiden University in 1995 (ISBN 9798258061).

*Sistem politik tradisional di Irian Jaya* culminates a much longer effort, based in part on library research, in part on fieldwork by the author himself, and in part on other field research carried out by students and junior colleagues in various parts of western New Guinea in the 1970s and 1980s. Among Mansoben's other works on the subject are two publications in English: 'Leadership and authority among the Keenok Asmat', *Irian; Bulletin of Irian Jaya Development (IBID)*, 3-3:51-60 (1974), and (with Malcolm Walker), 'Indigenous political structure and leadership patterns in Irian Jaya', in: *IBID* 18:17-24 (1990). *Sistem politik* itself is written in Indonesian, to facilitate its use in teaching and also for administrative purposes. It deals with sociocultural arrangements that obtained in the past, before first the Dutch and later the Indonesian authorities started imposing their rule. Mansoben bases much of his analysis on published data collected during fieldwork in the 1950s and 1960s. However, in one of his *stellingen*, the 'propositions' which doctoral candidates in the Netherlands are required to include in their dissertations, he approvingly quotes Ronald Berndt's statement that '[t]raditional themes, variable and vulnerable as they are, have a decided bearing on contemporary political thinking'.

Mansoben distinguishes four, or alternatively five, types of political systems, exemplified by nine lengthy case studies. The ambiguity about the number of types results from his subdividing one type, with Big Men as leaders, into two subtypes: one in which Big Men were primarily warriors

and war leaders, and another in which they were prominent in exchanges. The other three types were: first, the *ondoafi* system that obtained in the northeast, in the area near Jayapura; second, the *raja* system of the western and southwestern coastal areas and offshore islands; and third, a 'mixed' type (*kepemimpinan campuran*) found around Cenderawasih Bay and on the north coast of the Bird's Head. Mansoben borrows this last expression from Margaret Mead, who coined it to analyse her Manus data (p. 223). Mixed systems were diarchical in that they combined two heterogeneous forms of power: inherited power by elders, identified on the basis of kinship criteria, and achieved power by proven war leaders.

While the latter three types of systems were geographically restricted, occurring only in coastal areas and primarily (but not exclusively) among speakers of Austronesian languages, the Big Man system occurred in by far the largest part of Irian Jaya, and among by far the largest part of its population. Mansoben illustrates it using five case studies: Mejbrat, Me, Muyu, Dani (more specifically, Grand Valley Dani) and Asmat. In the first three of these cases, Big Men gained their status primarily through their role in exchanges; in the latter two, through war and fighting. However, the five examples make it clear that variations within the Big Man type also went beyond this basic dichotomy (pp. 123-48).

Mansoben's discussion of the *raja* and *ondoafi* systems is most welcome, since these do not appear to have occurred elsewhere in Melanesia. Moreover, other ethnographic information about the peoples concerned, where it is available at all, is scattered and difficult to find. Nor are these peoples mentioned in the Oceania volume of the *Encyclopedia of World Cultures* edited by Terence E. Hays (1991). The *raja* and *ondoafi* systems contrasted with Big Man systems in several respects, including greater emphasis on inherited power, greater centralization of power, and greater stratification. Mansoben also notes the presence of bureaucracies (p. 34). The *raja* type was a Melanesian adaptation of Moluccan forms of government, resulting from centuries of sustained contacts. It predated the arrival of Europeans in the area. The *ondoafi* type, however, cannot be explained in a similar way, which makes its occurrence the more intriguing.

In the opening chapter Mansoben outlines his theoretical approach. He favours a holistic approach in which political systems are examined in their sociocultural context, and succeeds in sticking to this in his admirably thorough contextualization of his case studies. In addition, Mansoben aspires to combine structural and processual data. In this respect he is less successful, since his discussion focuses on structure, in several cases because data on process are insufficiently available.

In the final chapter Mansoben examines four influential theories to assess whether they can advance the comparative study of political systems in

western New Guinea. The theories in question are Sahlins' identification of Polynesia and Melanesia as areas characterized by ascribed and achieved power respectively; Stagl's hypothesis that the power of Big Men is balanced by that of elders; Friedman's argument that a monopoly over prestige goods helped bring about the emergence of social stratification, whereas its absence made Big Man polities possible; and Godelier's 'Great Man' theory.

In Mansoben's view, none of these ideas is straightforwardly applicable to western New Guinea. Contrary to Sahlins, there were many instances of inherited power in New Guinea polities. Contrary to Stagl, the power of elders was often outbalanced by that of Big Men. Contrary to Friedman, in many New Guinea social formations – including Big Man polities – prestige goods did not play a prominent role at all. And with respect to Godelier, Mansoben views the 'Great Man' theory as a microtheory applicable only to one ethnic group, the Baruya (p. 274). On this last point, in my opinion, Mansoben misjudges the scope of Godelier's hypotheses. Like Mansoben, Godelier noted the differences among New Guinean polities. He also speculated on how these differences came into being historically, an undertaking also in line with Mansoben's own work.

Mansoben ends his analysis by stating that a satisfactory theory accounting for the variety of political forms in western New Guinea is not available – a modest but in my view realistic conclusion. His book is a most valuable contribution to the study of New Guinean political systems, thoroughly discussing the entire range of those systems. Regrettably, the book as a whole remains inaccessible to most anthropologists because it is written in Indonesian. The electronically available version does, however, include a 17-page summary in English.

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Timothy B. Barnard (ed.), *Contesting Malayness; Malay identities across boundaries*. Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2004, xiii + 318 pp. ISBN 9971692791, price SGD 32.00/USD 25.00 (paperback); 9971692953, SGD 55.00/USD 45.00 (hardback).

NATHAN PORATH

This is a very important book for Malay studies in particular and Southeast Asian studies in general. An indication of its importance is that most of the chapters are republications, having first appeared in an issue of the *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* that quickly sold out. Most are based on presentations at a conference, held at Leiden University in April 1998, which attempted to