Exoticism Reconsidered

Anthropology and Photography, 1860–1920. ELIZABETH EDWARDS, Ed. Royal Anthropological Institute, London, and Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 1992. xii, 275 pp., illus. $35.

Anthropology and Photography, 1860–1920 is a history of the use of photography in the early decades of British anthropology, a history now being questioned and redefined from the vantage points of the colonized as well as the colonizing culture of which early anthropology was a part.

The authors create this history through an examination of the photographic collection of the Royal Anthropological Institute in London. This is a massive archive, formally housed and largely ignored in the dusty basement of the institute, with many images originally on combustible cellulose-nitrate. Efforts to preserve and organize the photo archive led to a 1980s exhibit and catalog, *Observers of Man.* Though the exhibit opened the collection to the public, it reflected, in the words of the editor of the present volume, "a comfortable exoticism . . . which in the 1980's would be questioned with more edge." This volume revises and redevelops the historical relationship between photography and anthropology to explore its larger social, economic, and ideological context.

To undertake this, Elizabeth Edwards, archives curator at the Pitt Rivers Museum at Oxford, commissioned the efforts of 25 scholars, primarily from the British Isles. Their contributions include five introductory essays on the history of anthropology and photography, the nature of photographic communication, and the history of the RAI photo collection. These introductory essays are uneven, some even tangential to the volume. The strongest is certainly Edwards's masterly introduction, which reminds us that early anthropology was considered a close cousin of biology, a science of classification in an ideological frame of colonialism and social evolutionism. In this context, Edwards asserts, photography served the important function of "fact finding" and record keeping. But by 1920, where the book ends, photography had lost much of its influence in anthropology. There were two interesting reasons: that anthropology was becoming increasingly focused on social organization, "not necessarily conceived of as being visible in photographic terms," and that as photography became pervasive in popular culture it was devalued in scholarly research. In Edwards's words, "Photographs became specific to given fieldwork projects and marginal to the process of explanation rather than becoming part of a centrally conceived resource"—that is, seen as a record of the surface of culture rather than its inner workings. Thus the subject matter of the book is a "golden age," but an odd one at that.

The case studies draw upon the RAI collection to examine how photographic narratives elucidate other historical narratives, how the colonial subtexts of anthropology contributed to its visual dimension, and the issue of what actually constitutes an "anthropological photograph" (several case studies explore how photographs made for non-anthropological ends serve our current historical and anthropological purposes). Like the introductory essays, these case studies vary in quality and depth. Most are examinations of photographs, postcards, or scientific images to ask "How have these images come into being?" "What did the images mean in their original contexts?" "What can we read in the context of the present from the postures of the subjects, the framing of the images, the background/foreground relationships and other visual information lurking in the frame?" Several essays explore these questions in satisfying detail, but many of the authors seem to stop just as they are getting started. While recognizing that these are choices that each editor would make differently, I would have favored fewer essays that provided greater richness of historical and scholarly context.

It is difficult to single out highlights from 20 case studies. Brian Street's discussion of the "exhibiting the Other"—which shows how images (and the natives themselves) were cycled through British and other European cultures—reveals the disturbing cultural context from which a colonized anthropology emerged. Ira Jacknis examines the unlikely story of George Hunt, the Kwakiutl assistant to Franz Boas who in fact was an early native ethnographic photographer. Many of the case studies offer a Third World perspective that often reflects less certainty and closure than do the studies by Western anthropologists.

To the credit of the publisher, the photographs in the book are carefully reproduced and usually large enough so that the reader can accompany the writers in examining their detail.

Anthropology and Photography is a sometimes angry rejoinder to official versions of anthropology and will play an important role in the ongoing recasting of anthropological history. At the same time the contributors to this collection remind us that though interpreting photographs is an extremely subjective process it is not limited to personal comment. Interpretation is enhanced through the application of semiotic principles, which allow us to see images as sets of symbols; through an understanding of the institutional circumstances in which the photographic work was undertaken; through an understanding of the social categories into which the photographs were immediately and subsequently placed; and through an understanding of how photography itself produces visual information. *Anthropology and Photography* should be read by all those interested in the themes of social construction that knot this important collection together.

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Inducements to Conflict

War in the Tribal Zone. Expanding States and Indigenous Warfare. R. BRIAN FERGUSON and NEIL L. WHITEHEAD, Eds. School of American Research Press, Santa Fe, NM, 1992 (distributor, University of Washington Press, Seattle). xvi, 303 pp., illus. $35; paper, $15.95. School of American Research Advanced Seminar Series.

This book attempts to reorient the understanding of tribal warfare. Specifically, it emphasizes the influence of the politicoeconomic expansion of states, both archaic and modern, in creating, exacerbating, and transforming patterns of conflict among decentralized groups on state peripheries. The implications are threefold. First, the "tribal zone" of the book's title is not an indigenous group of societies but a sociopolitical formation created in the crucible of state margins and not understandable apart from state development. Second, the often virulent warfare that has often been ethnographically documented in the tribal zone