## 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.

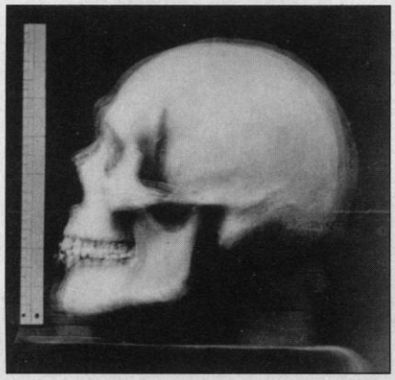
This book attempts to reorient the understanding of tribal warfare. Specifically, it emphasizes the influence of the politicoeconomic expansion of states, both archaic and modern, in creating, exacerbating, and transforming patterns of conflict among decentralized groups on state peripheries. The implications 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

## Anthropological Photographs

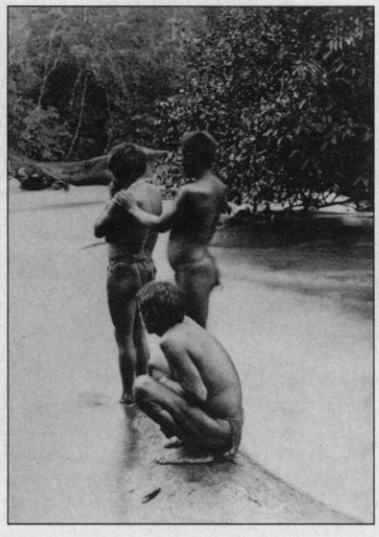
Batwa pygmies with Members of Parliament, London, 1905, photographed by Sir Benjamin Stone. The pygmies "were brought to England by an explorer and big-game hunter [and] appeared for a season at the Hippodrome along with such 'entertainments' as seventeen polar bears." The photograph elicited the following contemporary comment: "Surely extremes met when the little folk from the heart of the Ituri Forest in Central Africa, mixed with the Members on the Terrace of the House of Commons. They are supposed to be of the lowest type, mentally as well as the smallest, physically, of the human race. What did they think of the greatest Legislature of the world?" [paper by Brian Street; National Portrait Gallery]

"Sac and Fox man," late 19th century. "Many Indian portraits from this period raise this suspicion: the photographer knew what a noble savage should look like and did not hesitate to impose his vision on his subjects." In such portraits "a tomahawk was the favourite all-purpose prop. It verified the savage in the noble savage . . . , established the warlike qualities that made him a dangerous enemy and helped explain why the race . . . had been doomed in America." [paper by Brian W. Dippie]

Kuba man with statue, photographed during Emil Torday's Sankuru and Kasai River Expedition in 1908. On this expedition Torday was "able to exploit Kuba political divisions to acquire precious objects" such as this statue. "The photograph is of great value as a direct ethnographic record showing details such as the daily costume of court officials [and] authenticates the statue," now in the British Museum. "But it tells us much more . . . . The man has a deep frown; very possibly he keeps a hand on the statue to prevent it being snatched away. Clearly he is unhappy with this situation." [paper by Jan Vansina]



"Composite photograph of eight male *Ponca Indian Skulls* (adult) side view," by John S. Billings of the U.S. Army Medical Museum, mid-1880s. In 1868 Paul Broca had introduced the stereograph for use in craniometry. "The development of this simple device, however, does not seem to have kept others, such as [Billings], from experimenting with the photographic process in an effort to compare cranial profiles . . . . Despite subsequent improvement [Billings's apparatus] failed to match both the convenience and proficiency of Broca's stereographic technique." [paper by Frank Spencer]



"Which way down the falls?," a photograph by Everard im Thurn, about 1883–84. This "Rodinesque group of three Caribs . . . could easily be dismissed by the casual observer as posed . . . . It was possibly its obvious appeal to a classical Western aesthetic tradition which made this particular scene 'photographable' . . . but anyone who has witnessed tropical forest Indians in their everyday circumstance would recognize their posture [as] an entirely typical stance for Indians pausing above a section of rapids to scrutinize a likely route for a canoe . . . or witness the progress of a craft." [paper by Donald Taylor]

From *Anthropology and Photography, 1860–1920*

cannot be attributed to indigenous conflict patterns. Third, by implication, tribal warfare is not a long-standing feature of the human condition but is a function of the state.

This argument is at once highly provocative, selectively insightful, and deeply flawed. It is true that previous accounts of tribal warfare have often underemphasized the effect of state societies in transforming or intensifying "indigenous" conflict. The book's best chapters rigorously document the military effects that state political economy has unquestionably had upon its expanding margins: in the West African slave trade (Law), the Iroquois Confederacy (Abler), eastern Peru (Brown and Fernandez), and the postcolonial Papua New Guinea highlands (Strathern). These cases illustrate (i) the political and military effects of conflict over western trade routes and goods; (ii) the escalating conflict that occurs as state powers play indigenous groups off against one another, and as indigenous groups attempt to appropriate agents of state societies for their own conflicts; (iii) the effect of state-society military organization and weaponry as they are selectively introduced to and adopted by indigenous peoples; and (iv) the tremendously disruptive effect of diseases introduced by state societies, particularly from Europe to the Western Hemisphere. The very disruptive effects that expanding states have had on their peripheries are amply and often convincingly documented.

It does not necessarily follow, however, that conflict among decentralized indigenous peoples was minimal or undeveloped prior to encroachment from state societies. Using their critical sword too strongly, the book's editors underweight the role of indigenous warfare, which careful ethnographic and archeological study has revealed to have been pronounced among non-state sedentary but decentralized food-producing societies from many world areas. (Ethnographic documentation is particularly dramatic and pervasive from interior New Guinea, which was not appreciably influenced by state societies until well into the present century.) The editors tend to attribute all tribal warfare to the subsequent transformative effect of economic and political encroachment by Western and other states. In this, they juxtapose a negative view of the state against an inappropriately Rousseauian view of what used to be called "tribal" societies.

To suggest that tribal warfare has been so saturated by the influence of state societies that no information is effectively knowable outside of our own Western context (as is done, for example, on p. 200) is to make the editors' position nonfalsifiable and true by definition. As the book's best chapters amply demonstrate, the conflict dynamics of indigenous-state interaction need to be teased apart historically without sweeping either indigenous conflict patterns or the momentous and often horrendous effects of state political economies under the rug.

Refinement is needed; it does appear that the sociodemographic, economic, and ecological conditions for organized warfare were rare among decentralized hunter-gatherers, that is, prior to the advent of floral or faunal domestication and food production. And developed ethnocentrism appears to have been uncommon in the organizationally simplest human groups. But warfare often became pronounced with the development of sedentism and food production, even among many of the decentralized indigenous groups that the present book's editors tend to exonerate. This should not detract from but rather help refine their thesis that the interface between state and non-state societies has fundamentally shaped the world of modern human conflict in all world areas in which decentralized human groups have struggled against great odds to maintain even a semblance of self-determination.

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