

Living in the Stone Age: Reflections on the Origins of a Colonial Fantasy

. By Danilyn Rutherford. Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2018. 209 pp., illustrations, bibliography, index. ISBN 9780226570105 (hardback), 9780226570242 (paperback), 9780226570389 (ebook). US\$75.00 (hardback), US\$25.00 (paperback/ebook).

Fenneke Sysling

To cite this article: Fenneke Sysling (2020) Living in the Stone Age: Reflections on the Origins of a Colonial Fantasy, *The Journal of Pacific History*, 55:1, 140-141, DOI: [10.1080/00223344.2019.1633602](https://doi.org/10.1080/00223344.2019.1633602)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00223344.2019.1633602>



Published online: 09 Jul 2019.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 77



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

and women. By then, too, these impositions on an Indigenous population of French citizens weighed heavily in the formation of political parties by colonists and by Kanak councils of chiefs and notables. That legacy will continue to do so until the status of New Caledonia is resolved. In the meantime, CNRS publishers are to be congratulated for the quality of a presentation that lacks only a detailed index to help the reader.

COLIN NEWBURY

Linacre College, Oxford University

colin.newbury@linacre.ox.ac.uk

© 2019 Colin Newbury

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00223344.2019.1633092>



Living in the Stone Age: Reflections on the Origins of a Colonial Fantasy. By Danilyn Rutherford. Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2018. 209 pp., illustrations, bibliography, index. ISBN 9780226570105 (hardback), 9780226570242 (paperback), 9780226570389 (ebook). US\$75.00 (hardback), US\$25.00 (paperback/ebook).

Living in the Stone Age takes as its starting point the reputation of the western half of New Guinea, and the idea, which never fully disappeared, that Papuans were living in the Stone Age. That fantasy was introduced early in the 20th century when Western explorers became aware of the interior of New Guinea, and contrasted their technology with Papuan stone tools. Yet while Dutch explorations heralded the first steps towards installing Dutch sovereignty, the explorers were also vulnerable, insecure, and in need of the local Me and Moni inhabitants to survive. According to Danilyn Rutherford, it was in these circumstances where the comforting fantasy of the Stone Age was born, making the colonists' vulnerability bearable while justifying both their presence and plans of prolonged colonialism.

Rutherford's book is a collection of essays, half of which have been published before. The theme of the Stone Age myth keeps the book together but also allows Rutherford the space to muse on topics such as colonial practice and sovereignty, familiar themes in her work. The chapters also cohere nicely because, except for the last chapter, they have the same protagonists and are based on the same colonial sources. Based on a close reading of a limited set of sources, and following Ann Stoler's work, Rutherford scrutinizes these texts for desires and anxieties and takes time to draw out the meaning of the events described, with the help of a mix of thinkers from Hume to Derrida, and from John Austin to Michael Adas.

Part one provides an analysis of the concepts of hospitality and sympathy in the earliest encounters between Papuans of the Wissel Lakes of central New Guinea and the Dutch. Rutherford starts the first chapter where she ended in *Laughing at Leviathan* (2012), with a discussion of Jacques Derrida's analysis of D.H. Lawrence's poem *Snake* (1923). As in the earlier book, she emphasizes how performances of sovereignty need an audience, but this time she focuses on the concept of hospitality, and on who is the host and who is the guest in highland New Guinea. Dutch explorers and officials experienced what they interpreted as hospitality and an eagerness to come into contact with the Dutch. It became part of their fantasy and an argument for colonial state-building. The Papuans, on the other hand, had their own power politics and they too created myths; usually they presented foreigners as the descendants of long-lost relatives. Rutherford does not say this explicitly but apparently both groups, the Dutch and the Papuans, forged connections (but at safe distance) by linking strangers to ancestors.

Chapter two looks at sympathy in early Dutch state-building. The analysis draws its inspiration from David Hume and his emphasis on an embodied, impassioned encounter as the starting point of governance. As in Hume's understanding, the Dutch first had to sympathize with the Papuans to domesticate the differences between them, to make Papuans

‘predictable according to our concepts’, as the Resident of Ambon put it (p. 18). This ‘fantasy of familiarity’ (p. 64) only worked within the horizon of an expanding Dutch empire, without which the work the Dutch put into friendly interactions would have become meaningless.

Part two of the book includes another two chapters and deals with technology, still paying close attention to the passions and desires that are part of our relations with technology. The Dutch were proud to have compasses and other technology to keep their ‘trekking machine’ going (p. 19), but at the same time, they were helpless without Papuans with whom they could exchange tools for food. Machines were the measure of man, Rutherford argues with Michael Adas in chapter three, but from an experience of impotence and vulnerability.

In chapter four Rutherford takes as a starting point the performances of technology that were supposed to show the mastery of the Dutch. Even when contact was on friendly terms, the Dutch still felt that Papuans needed to know how dangerous Dutch guns were, so they made a technology performance out of shooting pigs. Similarly, though less deadly, the gramophone was used to impress Papuans. Inspired by the concept of ‘speech acts’, Rutherford uses these events to show how colonial officials suggested that they were responsible for their device’s agency, redrawing the line between Stone Age and modernity that was often blurred in their interactions.

Each chapter in the book ends with parallels between colonial explorations and today’s ethnographic practices. The final chapter brings these strands together to formulate a lesson for anthropology, again inspired by Hume’s account of sympathy and by James Clifford and George Marcus’s *Writing Culture* (1986). Rutherford emphasizes the importance of passion in ethnographical work and of the recognition of the epistemological and ethical work it does. She calls for a ‘kinky empiricism’ (p. 149) that acknowledges the messy reality and dialogical character of fieldwork, and that takes up the obligations that come with creating new knowledge. This is hard to disagree with, although easier said than done.

Living in the Stone Age is a subtly argued, well-written book that combines a personal touch with theoretical insights. The close-up on New Guinea does not mean this book lacks interest for those specializing in other parts of the world. Graduate students and scholars in anthropology, colonialism, first contacts and sovereignty are certain to find something to their liking.

FENNEKE SYSLING

University of Utrecht

f.h.sysling@uu.nl

© 2019 Fenneke Sysling

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00223344.2019.1633602>



Found in Translation: Many Meanings on a North Australian Mission. By Laura Rademaker. Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 2018. xix + 231 pp., illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. ISBN 9780824872656 (hardback). US\$68.00.

When I first saw Laura Rademaker’s book I liked the name. *Found in Translation* explores the relationships between the Church Missionary Society (CMS) lay missionaries and the Anindilyakwa of the Groote Eylandt archipelago in the mid-20th century. By focusing on what is *found* (rather than lost), the title suggests a positive narrative; one that immediately challenges the deficit narrative – loss of language, country, identity, and culture – that so often pervades discussion of colonization and assimilation. In this account, Rademaker moves beyond the narrative of the colonizer and the colonized, beyond the idea of victimhood, by highlighting the