

There is merit in *The Nandi of Kenya*. Dr. Langley tiptoes around certain practices and avoids stating outright that there are initiation rites that are hardly less than female mutilation. But still readers deserve better because there are better books in print. Anyone interested in finding out what life is like in Kenya and what it feels like to be a Kenyan would be well served by selecting Ngugi over Langley.

--Jean Bright
Rutherfordton, NC

ANDREW STRATHERN, *ONGKA: A SELF ACCOUNT BY A NEW GUINEA BIG MAN*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979, 162 pp., \$19.95.

Ongka, A Self Account by a New Guinea Big Man is an oral narrative of the history and culture of a New Guinea big man named Ongka. A big man is a political leader within the Melpan culture of New Guinea. Ongka has served as a local government counsellor and is an outstanding political figure in his homeland. He presented his narrative to Andrew Strathern in the Melpan language via cassette recorder and Strathern translated his words into English.

Ongka's story takes place in the highland region of Papua, New Guinea. His home area is Mount Hagen. The staple crop is the sweet potato, and pigs are a main source of revenue. The Hagen people are from a polygynous culture and live in clans. The clan members link their origin to a single ancestral founder, territory and sacred oath substance.

Ongka is in his sixties at the time of this narrative when he sensitively describes the clan lifestyle from childhood to adulthood. He elaborates on the relationships of the men to their women and children. He includes a delightful discussion of their courting, marriage and divorce procedures. Ongka has five wives, thirteen children and seven grandchildren. He is considered to be successful in his homeland and periodically increases his family thusly, "women would come to me and say, you're a big man, let me marry you." Ongka agreed and married them. But later if he saw them running around with other men he told them, "to be off" and if there were any children, he kept them saying to the women, "you didn't bring these children with you when you came as a girl to me" and sent the women off to marry someone else if they liked.

Ongka also recounts significant events in his life such as his birth, birthplace, naming, his youth, his wives, family and work. He describes cultural traditions such as the ceremonies at his mother's death, his father, Kaepa's role as leader and warrior for the Kawaelka people, the usage of stone axe and

modern tools prior to the arrival of the first Europeans in the 1930's, warfare and Moka.

Moka is an important concept of the Hagen people. Strathern devotes an entire chapter to Ongka's discussion of the Big Moka of 1974 which eventually became the basis of the British film based on Ongka's recollections and Strathern's research entitled, "Ongka and the Big Moka." I was fortunate to have seen this film which in combination with this book gave me a clearer perception of Ongka, his culture and The Big Moka. Moka is a form of exchange or what early anthropologists called Total Prestation, by which individuals or groups are bound together and compete for prestige and influence. The rule is that to make Moka one must be generous. One must give away a great deal of wealth. However, this is considered an investment because the recipient must reciprocate with even more generosity in order to maintain prestige in their society. Pigs, shells and money are some of the primary items of exchange. The big Moka event occurred as Ongka was in charge of returning a Moka. His people had been given 400 pigs by a neighboring group thus it was time to return the Moka. Ongka and his people maintained their prestige by giving among other things, 700 pigs, ten thousand dollars, and a motor bike to the neighboring group.

Andrew Strathern punctuates this narrative with a detailed introduction that provides needed background information about Ongka and the Melpan society, maps that identify unfamiliar locations mentioned in the narration and photographs of Ongka, in various cultural dress, his family and clansmen. He also has many explanatory footnotes. These footnotes are necessary in order to understand the linguistic and socio-historical features that are unfamiliar to the reader.

Strathern has structured the discussed chapters of this book by subjects rather than in a chronological sequence of events. It appears that he did not edit Ongka's words very much, and, consequently, some chapters have repetitive information, confusing organization and segments of dual narration. However, this narrative is generally interesting, informative and well worth reading. It provides the reader with a glimpse into the life and culture of the Mount Hagen people of New Guinea as visualized through the eyes of Ongka, a New Guinea big man.

--Virginia Stamper
Afro-American Studies
UW-Milwaukee
