Merlan / Rumsey

Ku Waru

Language and Segmentary Politics in the Western Nebilyer Valley, Papua New Guinea

The highlanders of New Guinea are renowned for their elaborate systems of ceremonial exchange. Although much has been written about them, previous accounts have concentrated far less on the conduct of exchange events than on the structure of exchange systems. This book deals centrally with the conduct of particular exchange events, and shows through examination of them how larger social structures are reproduced and transformed. As part of the emphasis on exchange as social action, the book closely examines the oratory that plays a crucial part in the events. Basing their study on original fieldwork carried out in the Nebilyer Valley, Francesca Merlan and Alan Rumsey focus on an inter related set of large-scale compensation payments which arose out of an episode of warfare. This cycle is particularly remarkable, as women stopped the fighting, and participated for the first time as transactors and orators in the ensuing exchange events. This book furthers our understanding of the interaction between social structures and historical events; and particularly of the crucial role of talk. It will be of special interest to anthropologists and linguists.

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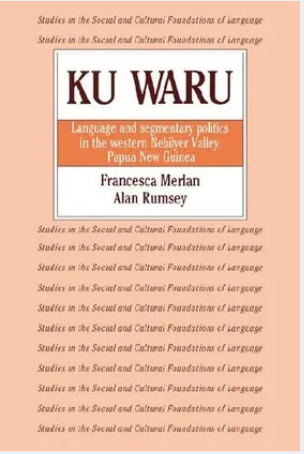

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