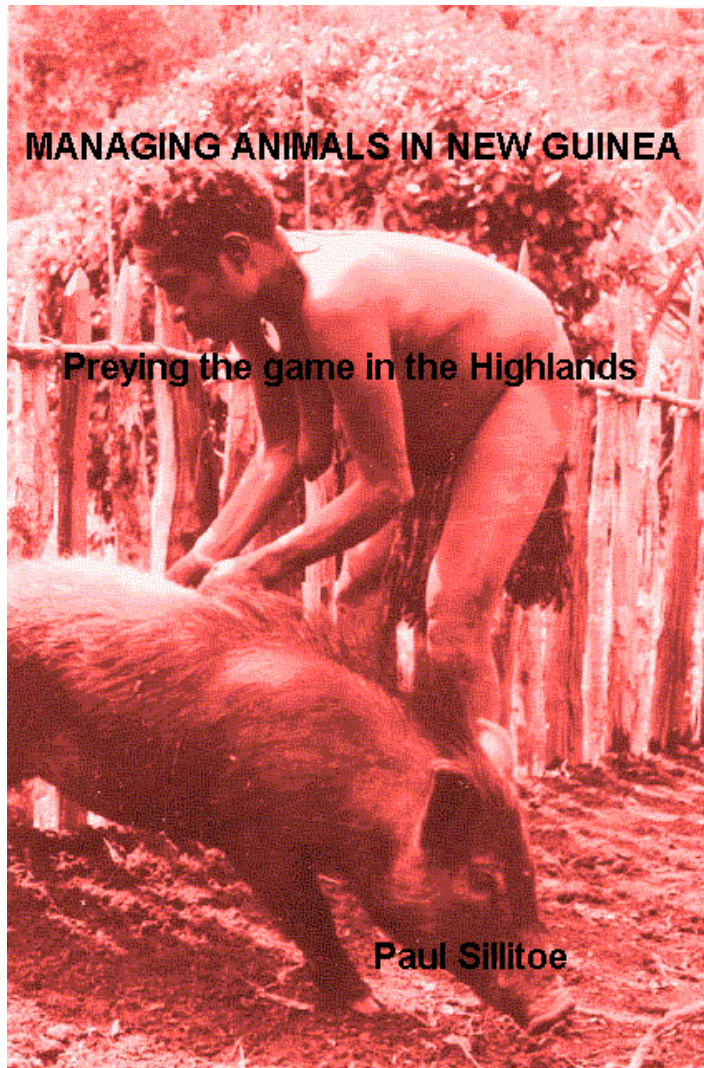


MANAGING ANIMALS IN NEW GUINEA PREYING THE GAME IN THE HIGHLANDS

Paul Sillitoe



Managing Animals in New Guinea deals with the place of animals in the subsistence regime of New Guinea Highlanders. It investigates the classification, exploitation and management of both wild and domesticated creatures. The Highlands region has extensive areas of rainforest, which are home to a wide range of game animals. And bristly wild-looking pigs are to be seen everywhere in settled parts of valleys, people keeping sizeable herds.

The book comprises the fourth in a series studying the subsistence regime of the Wola people of the Papua

New Guinea Highlands, one of the most comprehensive studies in existence. The volume on crops, their classification, propagation and consumption is *Roots of the Earth: the cultivation and classification of crops in the Papua New Guinea highlands* (Manchester University Press, 1983). The one on natural resources, soils and the environment is *A Place Against Time: land and environment in the Papua New Guinea highlands* (Harwood Academic 1996). And the one on horticultural practices, swidden cultivation and crop husbandry is *Horticulture in Papua New Guinea: case studies from the Southern and Western Highlands*. (Ethnology Monographs No. 18, 2002 (with P. Stewart & A. Strathern).

The intention of this website is to present further data on animals mentioned in the book; to serve as a series of appendices. These are as follows:

APPENDICES

[I: Identifications of all animals named in hunting accounts](#)

[II Hunting diaries of individual hunters.](#)

[III Hunting by age of hunters](#)

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[V. Number of pigs herded by women and social status of senior male relative](#)

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The Book: The same approach to ethnographic, scientific and theoretical issues informs this study of animals as the previous volumes in the series. The aim throughout is to present the ethnography and related quantitative data as evidence which support possible answers to issues which their investigation initially pose, dubbed ‘ethnographic determinism’. The genius of anthropology is to convey the insights of people whomever and wherever they are and we are becoming aware that adherence to particular theories may hinder us.

While never swerving from a belief in the central importance of ethnographic evidence, it would patently be foolish to suggest that this study, or its predecessors, avoid biases. One such preconceived notion for example, is the assumption that the natural environment sets certain parameters on the livelihood strategies of people and their relations with, and exploitation of animals. Another assumption that is not beyond question is the decision to set the discussion of animals within the transactional socio-political context of Highland society. These sorts of assumptions are necessary to order the evidence and advance some kind of understanding of it.

The assumption about the natural environment allows the book to adopt a long term perspective on animal exploitation in the Highlands. It uses contemporary practices to speculate on the course of events during prehistory, such as the feasibility of seasonal visitors to the region as opposed to forager populations living there. There are consequences too for understanding of biodiversity and conservation, two contemporary issues of interest. It turns to ecological theory to investigate the cost of living in the Highlands region. A time and energy accounting approach not only questions assumptions about hunting and gathering in the past and puts the relative notion of affluence in an intriguing comparative context, but it also shows that while animal rearing, notably of domestic pigs, may give a good return, if animals are slaughtered when adult, people regularly keep them for years and may incur negative energy returns on their labour. This relates to the high cultural premium put on pigs which relates to socio-political exchange.

Transactional considerations drive the ‘economy’ and consideration of these informs this study, like the previous ones. The assumption about the centrality of exchange activity is borne out of a conviction that it is pivotal to understanding the broadly speaking ‘economic’ issues addressed in this book. Many creatures are not only good to eat but they are also good to give away, serving as wealth that persons may present to one another in the socio-political exchanges that feature centrally in Highland society. ‘Playing the game’ and earning social respect demands whole-

hearted commitment to transaction. People kill and eat creatures at infrequent communal events that bring celebrity to all, being large collective displays and transactions of animal wealth. We can see their acephalous political legacy in their attitudes to animals. One of the key issues to understanding observed events and behaviour, is to comprehend compliance with the continuance of a markedly egalitarian socio-political environment and the centrality of personal autonomy, and the implications for what goes on. The focus on the socio-political dimensions of animals in stateless transactional contexts is new. It is a different emphasis to that prominent in many anthropological studies of animals to-date.

The comments on the intertwined relationship between evidence and interpretation, and the struggle to accord the former priority, relate to how we can justify what we think we know. This question takes on a particular spin in relation to people's livelihood practices that are as much the product of experience as intellect, being skills passed on by practical demonstration, not neatly to be tied down by any theory. People engage in them and do not debate them, which can put anthropologists in the awkward position of appearing to explain what people themselves cannot explain, while it is their cultural practices and behaviour that comprise the knowledge! There is growing interest in the experiential as opposed to intellectual dimensions of knowledge. (For example in calls for indigenous knowledge research to inform development. The practical aims of development - poverty alleviation, advancement of sustainable livelihoods, equitable resource use - centre attention on these issues.) This book explores these issues further. It touches several times on related methodological issues, and my patently limited and distorted understanding. The problems we face in tackling tacit knowledge are compounded when we consider the shadowy and distorted representations we achieve when we try to convey whatever we do manage to learn using the written word. While the only real way to learn about hunting or pig domestication is to hunt or train an animal, this does not invalidate attempts, however partial, to set something down about these matters, but it puts them in perspective. It also confirms the centrality this study, like its predecessors, accords to the ethnographic evidence. In this respect it seeks to refute the current post-modern assertion that anthropology is fiction.

The book comprises three parts.

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References

The fractious Wola zoological taxonomy and their disputed classifications are described in Part 1. Their approach to taxonomy is understandable when seen in uncentralised political context, rendering parallels with hierarchical scientific taxonomies inappropriate. The attitude of people to hunting, investigated in Part 2, is also puzzling at first sight in its off-handedness - which has important albeit unvoiced conservation implications. It becomes clearer when viewed in terms of the implications of production for a transactionally structured social order. The Wola perspective on pig husbandry and management, explored in Part 3, is likewise perplexing in the light of capitalistic assumptions of scarcity and maximisation. It makes more sense when set in the context of the obfuscation of the control of production in an exchange-focussed society- coming to terms with these arrangements is central furthermore to understanding gender relations in this culture.

