

BOOK REVIEW

Peter Hempenstall. *Truth's Fool: Derek Freeman and the War over Cultural Anthropology*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2017.

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INTRODUCTION

The late Emeritus Professor (John) Derek Freeman was such a towering and dominant presence in the study of Austronesian cultures, specifically in his extended fieldwork among the Iban of the Baleh region of Sarawak and the Samoans of Sa'anapu in Western Samoa that his biography by Peter Hempenstall deserves an extended review. I use the term “biography” as a shorthand. Hempenstall tells us that his work “takes the biographer’s perspective and the historian’s tools”; *Truth's Fool* is “part biography, part intellectual history, and partly a historian’s appraisal of the controversy that swirled around Freeman’s view of [Margaret] Mead... from the 1980s into the new century” (p. x). Much of Freeman’s private and domestic life, his childhood, his activities outside of research and writing are not on view in this book.

Hempenstall has accomplished an enormous, arduous and complex task. Not only does he explore Freeman’s career and the origins and development of his thinking and scholarly motivations, but also, in particular, “the interior intellectual and emotional life of Freeman” and how he “understood and explained himself” to the outside world (p. xi). After its publication there was a flurry of online reviews which illustrate the interest which the book has generated, most of it, in my view, sensational and inappropriate in evaluating Freeman’s contribution to anthropology (Macintyre 2018; Rex 2018). Rex’s blog, though it is generally positive, presents a too simple view in concluding that “Freeman’s reputation is that of a damaged and hurtful man: anthropology’s

original dude troll.” Yes, he had a “choleric personality,” but the focus on his behaviour in this way tends to result in the easy dismissal of his scholarly achievements. This also goes for Macintyre’s review as someone who knew Freeman (2018); there is much with which I agree, but the discussion of his alleged “madness” is unnecessary. However, I do concur with her conclusion that “the murk surrounding Freeman’s critical appraisal of Mead’s Samoan work remains.”

Some of the reviewers have mixed opinions about the book and also the stance Hempenstall adopts in interpreting Freeman’s mental state, his behaviour, his relations with academic colleagues, students and opponents, and the ways in which he went about criticising Margaret Mead’s work on Samoa. But Caterson’s review, for example, is to the point. Quoting Robert Louis Stevenson’s conclusion on Samoa in 1892 that “It is hard to reach the truth of these islands,” Caterson then continues, “Stevenson who died in 1894 could never have anticipated the prophetic dimension added to those words,” and “Less than a century later, in the 1980s, the Western understanding of Samoan society would become the subject of a fierce and protracted international dispute among anthropologists and others that has raged ever since” (2018). We cannot say this of Freeman’s Iban studies.

Hempenstall had access to an enormous amount of material in diaries, correspondence, interviews and published work to gain insight into the complexities of Freeman’s personality and his intellectual history. Most importantly he had collaborated with the late Professor Don Tuzin, to whom the book is dedicated, a loyal student of Freeman (his “surrogate father”) who collected a considerable weight of information on his mentor, including recorded interviews. After Tuzin’s death, Hempenstall was given generous access to Tuzin’s papers by his widow. Hempenstall also conducted a wide range of interviews himself, and enjoyed the cooperation of the Freeman family.

This only points to the central dilemma in writing about Freeman. How do you capture and evaluate the complexities expressed in his behaviour, motivations and personality in relation to his scholarly achievements? These difficulties are compounded when there is a need to provide a balanced assessment of the extended “war” that Freeman fought with the American anthropological establishment. In my view, Hempenstall has given us a measured and informed appreciation of what Freeman achieved, and where, sadly, he failed; his scholarly work was sometimes blighted by his mental state, which expressed itself most vividly in his approach to academic debate. He even managed to alienate some of his own supporters like Hiram Caton.

In spite of his achievements Freeman was sometimes his own worst enemy and what could have been an outstanding academic career became marred in controversy. Undoubtedly there is evidence of brilliance which has been clouded by “the negative reputation Freeman had in many anthropologists’ minds” (p. xii).

Much of Hempenstall’s interpretation of Freeman’s life and work is based on two concepts: “heresy” and “truth’s fool.” Freeman was a dissenter, a non-conformist, an oddity, a “truth’s fool” who has “the temerity to prick the illusions of his master” (p. 6). Freeman stated that he was in search of social scientific truth and the progressive elimination of error. He was in “dogged pursuit of an objective world ruled by scientific principles” (p. xii). The play *Heretic* by David Williamson and directed by Wayne Harrison, which opened at the Sydney Opera House in 1996, captures this dimension of Freeman’s life. As a result of Freeman’s criticisms of Mead’s work, expressed in the strongest and most caustic terms in *Margaret Mead and Samoa* (1983) on which Williamson’s play focused, he came to be “vilified and dismissed as a dangerous heretic” and a “a disruptive figure” (p. x).

MY INTEREST

My interest in Hempenstall’s book stems not so much from the Mead controversy but from my earlier career in the anthropology of Borneo. I have much admired Freeman’s monographs on the Iban: *Iban Agriculture* (1955a), *Report on the Iban of Sarawak* (1955b) and its later edition (1970), and his exemplary essay “On the Concept of the Kindred” (1961) among much else. As a young anthropologist travelling light in Kalimantan in the early 1970s the only monograph I took with me was Freeman’s *Report on the Iban* (1970). In those days there were very few fieldwork guides that could be easily carried in a rucksack, but I decided that Freeman was worth keeping me company. During my preparations for fieldwork I also corresponded with Freeman and, on my return, we exchanged relatively frequent letters on the concept of the kindred and other matters on bilateral social organisation (King 1976: 2013).

The Maloh (Embaloh and Taman) communities that I lived with in the Upper Kapuas region of West Kalimantan were rather different in social organisation and culture from the Iban, but they were close neighbours, they spoke the Iban language, they intermarried and traded with each other, and some Maloh were eventually assimilated into Iban society. I frequently met Iban visitors to Maloh villages (King 1985). I also stayed in Iban longhouses

in Sarawak and the Upper Embaloh river. Subsequently, in the 1980s and the early 1990s I undertook research on agricultural modernisation, resettlement and environmental change in a wide range of Iban communities in Sarawak. This sustained interest in the Iban occasioned my engagement with Freeman's work and our correspondence (King 2013: 2017).

Although Freeman was involved in disputes about aspects of his Iban ethnography, this was a sideshow in comparison with the Mead controversy, and Hempenstall rightly focuses on the "rolling warfare" between the disruptive antipodean and the "serried ranks of American anthropologists" (p. xi). However, I think there is much more to be said on Freeman's Iban studies. In this connection, Hempenstall's assessment of Freeman's earlier Iban work suggests that had he not embarked on the "Mead Thing" and approached it in the way that he did, then he might well have been granted a more significant place in anthropology for all the right reasons. Hempenstall says that Freeman's "reputation as a master ethnographer, with classic works of observation and analysis on the Iban people of Borneo remains largely unsullied" (p. 7). He traces the path that Freeman took from upriver Sarawak to Mead's Samoa as "part of a complicated trajectory and a fascinating tale" (p. 7). Yet perhaps Freeman's return to Samoa in the 1960s where he got stuck with Mead's and his own baggage was not the wisest career move. In my view, he should have stayed in Borneo as "Mr. Southeast Asia" rather than go further east as "Mr Pacific." For these reasons my review focuses primarily on Freeman and Borneo.

THE BOOK

It was through these interests in Freeman's work on Borneo that I found Peter Hempenstall's book particularly absorbing, though not as thrilling as Judith Heimann's biography of Tom Harrisson, another dominant figure in Borneo studies and late Curator of the Sarawak Museum (1998). Harrisson's life was spicy, adventurous and improbable whilst Freeman's was characterised by a "harsh intellectualism" (p. 8) (see King 2000). Heimann describes, as does Hempenstall, the Freeman-Harrisson "event" in Kuching in 1961 which changed Freeman's world: two aggressive and dominant male human animals in contention, sharing some of the same traits (eccentricity, offensiveness, aggression, hostility, bad-temperedness, bullying and disruptive behaviour). It was hardly surprising that they came into conflict. In an encounter with Harrisson during her stay in Sarawak with her husband, Monica Freeman

notes in her diaries that Harrison looked “very sinister and cynical” (in Appell-Warren 2009: 52). There was a dimension of masculine domination in this abrasive contention, wrapped up in conflicting interpretations of the indigenous cultures of Borneo.

Hempenstall delves into Freeman’s mind and behaviour and some of his chapter headings are given imaginative and intriguing slants. After an introductory “The Freeman Show,” he divides his investigation into two parts: the first, *A Heretical Life* (including, for example, *The Man-Most-Likely To; Mr Southeast Asia or Mr Pacific?*; “My Kierkegaardian Earthquake”; *Face-to-Face with the Incubus*; “The Trouble with Derek Is...”); and the second, *The Mead Thing* (with four chapters: *A Not-So-Simple Journey*; *The Banquet of Consequences*; *Hunting Heretics* and “We Are Kin to All That Lives”). Obviously, a great deal of attention is devoted to contextualising and evaluating Freeman’s 1983 book (and see 1996) and his criticisms of Mead’s fieldwork, methods, assumptions and findings in Samoa, revealed in her anthropological best-seller (1928); and then his subsequent interminable exchanges with those, mainly American anthropologists, who came to Mead’s defence and were critical of Freeman’s approach, motives, style and arguments. Freeman’s subsequent book on Mead’s supposed “hoaxing” which he saw as the vindication and explanation of his earlier criticisms and as serving to lay to rest the whole affair, published two years before his death (1999), merely served to restoke the fires. The continuing controversy was interrogated and concluded in some measure by Paul Shankman (2009). Undoubtedly “The Mead Thing” was one of the fiercest fought, longest running and nastiest disputes in anthropology. In some respects, as compelling as a television soap opera, it did not do a great deal for the reputation of anthropology.

The issues which were debated went to the heart of what anthropology claims to do and that is to investigate what it is to be human and what roles nature, environment and nurture play in shaping and giving definition to humankind? Freeman argued that Mead’s work and that of her mentors, Franz Boas and Ruth Benedict, approached the study of human behaviour, culture and organisation from a “cultural determinist” perspective. According to Freeman the Boasian school had “an ideological commitment to culture” (p. 4). What was needed instead was to develop “an interactionist paradigm” exploring the relationships between biology and culture and the utility of the fields of psychology, psychoanalysis, psychiatry, evolutionary genetics, molecular biology and ethology in understanding the human condition. Freeman’s paradigm focused on the complex interactions between heredity, cultural behaviour and environment. On the other hand, in Mead’s search for

the reasons for the stresses and strains of adolescence and the problems and pains of growing up, prevalent in the West, Freeman argued that she focused mistakenly on “cultural conditioning.” Further, she supposed she had found that there was an absence of anxiety, tension and conflict in Samoa and her explanation was to be found in the relaxed attitude to teenage sexual relations; “sexual freedom and minimal discipline” in Samoa were the keys to explaining their relatively trouble-free adolescent years (p. 3).

In contrast to Mead’s characterisation of Samoan socialisation practices and upbringing, Freeman argued for “a tightly constrained, highly regulated sexual atmosphere” accompanied by “significant competitiveness and sexual violence” (p. 4). Mead’s and Freeman’s views of Samoan adolescent culture could not have been more starkly drawn. However, we must keep in mind that Mead undertook her study in the eastern islands of American Samoa (later renamed Manu’a) in the mid-1920s, and Freeman in the western islands of what was previously German Samoa and then, following the settlement in the aftermath of the Great War became the colony of Western Samoa administered by New Zealand. His first study took place in the early 1940s and his much more detailed ethnographic work as a professional anthropologist in the 1960s 40 years after Mead. Perhaps this has significance?

EARLY YEARS AND THEN SAMOA

Freeman was born in Wellington, New Zealand in 1916. In explaining his behaviour in later life much is made of his relationship to his “strong, fervent” Presbyterian mother, Elsie May: “the force” in Freeman’s young life. She was a “cultured” woman with ambitions for her only son. A strong thread running through Hempenstall’s biography is that of Freeman engaged in a “lifelong struggle against domination by others” (p. 18). His father, John Henry, “feckless” and “inoffensive” was the owner of an upmarket hairdressing business; apparently his son was “inordinately ashamed of his father,” a man uninterested in literature. The young John Derek’s only sibling was Margaret, who recalled “the spell their mother cast on their upbringing and how dramatic life within the family could be” (p. 18). Nurture or nature? This begins to tell us something about the origins of Freeman’s personality.

In 1934 Freeman enrolled as a student at the University of New Zealand’s Victoria College, following courses in psychology, philosophy and education; but his school results at Wellington Technical College “where he failed the proficiency tests,” meant that he “had to matriculate to the university

via an alternative route” (p. 20). Apparently with his rather lacklustre school performance a “small seed of self-doubt sprouted” (p. 20). Given that Freeman’s father would only cover his son’s university fees for one year and wanted him to join his hairdressing business, Freeman then took up employment in a local newspaper and continued his studies part-time. He also pursued a teacher-training course for two years in 1936–1937 and was awarded a certificate at Wellington Teacher’s Training College.

By all accounts in his probationary teaching year he was a gifted, inspiring and somewhat unconventional primary school teacher. He then joined Ernest Beaglehole’s graduate seminar in psychology at Victoria College in 1938, despite poor university examination results, and acquired a taste for Beaglehole’s interest in anthropology. Freeman had also studied psychology with Thomas Hunter who was examining the interaction between biology and culture (p. 24). This early exposure to the relations between psychology and anthropology helps explain Freeman’s later movement towards an interactionist paradigm, though at that time Freeman was persuaded by the American anthropology argument of cultural conditioning in socialisation processes. Nevertheless, though Freeman was gifted intellectually, he failed to complete his university degree, perhaps in part because of the pressures of being unable to study full-time and following a teacher-training course as well. Hempenstall suggests that “a cloudiness of purpose, reflected in a failure to complete his degree, afflicted him” (p. 25).

Freeman’s increasing interest in anthropology led him to grasp the chance to travel to Polynesia in 1939 and take up an assistant master’s post in the government primary school in Apia, Western Samoa in April 1940 (p. 20). As something of a student radical and free-thinker, a sojourn in Samoa enabled him to distance himself from what he perceived to be “the conventionalities of Wellington life” (p. 23) and to flee maternal pressures (pp. 25–26). As a student Freeman had also become a disciple of “the Indian divine Jiddu Krisnamurti, who preached a radical scepticism about all dogmas” and the search for knowledge and enlightenment through the “primacy of the individual.” In his mid-teens Freeman also read avidly in philosophy and the works of Darwin and Huxley (p. 23). Under these influences he departed from Presbyterianism; the seeds of his non-conformity became increasingly evident.

Hempenstall discusses in admirable detail Freeman’s productive and personally satisfying time in Western Samoa and his preparations for a “heretical life” (pp. 27–33). Freeman developed a love for the islands and found great enjoyment as a teacher; he demonstrated his formidable linguistic abilities in learning the Samoan language; he deepened his interest in Samoan

culture, was incorporated into village lineage and social life, and began his engagement with Sa'anapu, spending a total of five months there in 1942–1943. He left Samoa in 1943, joining the Royal New Zealand Naval Volunteer Reserve after Pearl Harbor, and went to England for training; whilst there he established contact with Professor Raymond Firth at the London School of Economics (LSE) to forward his studies on Samoa (pp. 33–35). Freeman's field-working energy, cross-cultural skills and ethnographic materials convinced Firth to accept him onto the Postgraduate Diploma in Anthropology. Had Firth not done so, then where would the anthropology of Borneo be now? Whatever else we might want to say about Freeman, he put the Iban on the anthropological map.

EARLY EXPERIENCES AND BORNEO

In relating Freeman's later Iban research to these early experiences it helps explain his great attraction, empathy and affinity for Iban culture and behaviour, expressed in their strong individualism, egalitarianism and commitment to the principle that leadership and authority had to be earned and continually demonstrated and not acquired through hereditary succession. Though governed by customary law, the Iban were non-conformists and free-thinkers, as was Freeman.

In addition, Freeman's failure to complete his undergraduate studies might cast light on another dimension of his Borneo experience. Undoubtedly his two published studies of the Iban, based on field research from January 1949 to June 1951, achieved a different level of ethnographic detail and analysis than the reports of his two fellow field researchers in Sarawak: that of W. R. Geddes on the Land Dayaks (1954) and H. S. Morris on the Oya Melanau (1953). The three anthropologists (along with Tien Ju-K'ang [1953]) were funded by the Colonial Social Science Research Council (CSSRC) from 1948 to undertake socio-economic studies in Sarawak. The New Zealand dimension is significant and gives a certain colour to the relationships between the three co-workers. Raymond Firth, the New Zealander, Professor at the LSE and Secretary of the Council, was a crucial influence (as was Edmund Leach) in the selection of Freeman, Geddes and Morris, all of whom had studied anthropology with Firth.

I pondered the reasons why the three field researchers, working in the same British colony and research programme had not collaborated. Just the sheer matter of distances and difficulties of travel in Sarawak at that time kept them apart, and they were each preoccupied with their own in-depth

ethnographic studies. Yet Freeman's wife, Monica, in her diaries, indicates disharmony. In a visit that Morris paid to the Freemans during their field research, she refers to him as her husband's "rival"; she says "The visit was not a success"; "He [Morris] and Derek had a bad effect on one another" (in Appell-Warren 2009: 51, 54). In the case of Geddes, Monica indicates that he was a "deadly rival" (2009: 573).

Geddes, a New Zealander, born in New Plymouth in the same year as Freeman, had an exemplary academic career prior to his Sarawak research. He attended the University of Otago with a BA in 1938 and an MA in 1939, majoring in philosophy. He had also followed a one-year course in anthropology. He was appointed as a demonstrator at Otago in 1939–1940. He served in the New Zealand military in Fiji from 1941 to 1945; on the basis of that experience he wrote a memoir for the Polynesian Society (1945) and received his PhD at the LSE in 1948. He lectured in psychology at Birkbeck College in 1947–1948 (Golson 2007).

Morris was not such an academic high-flyer, but he was a university graduate. Born in Weymouth, England in 1913, three years Freeman's senior, Morris' mother was a New Zealander, his father a civil engineer in the colonial service, and Morris' childhood was spent in Rhodesia. Morris returned to school in England, attended Weymouth College "in order to become an Englishman," and then went to the University of Edinburgh and was awarded a BSc in Forestry in 1934. He then switched careers and trained as a solicitor in London. Following the Second World War he enrolled for the Postgraduate Diploma in Anthropology at the LSE, 1945–47 (Clayre 1993: 3–4; King 1994 17–18).

Freeman's background as a primary school teacher in Samoa, who subsequently had not been accepted to pursue doctoral studies on Samoa in May 1945 because he did not have a Bachelor's degree (although he was accepted onto the Diploma programme at the LSE in 1946), could well have been an issue in Freeman's relationships with the other two CSSRC researchers: Geddes with a BA, MA, PhD, publications and university teaching experience ("a deadly rival"), and Morris with a BSc, a legal background, and Freeman's senior in age and in the Postgraduate Diploma in Anthropology ("a rival"). Freeman gained his Diploma in 1948 for his thesis on "The Social Structure of a Samoan Village Community," submitted in 1947 (p. 41). Given Freeman's ambitions, his view of his abilities, his experience in Samoa, his command of languages, and his confidence in his skills as a committed field anthropologist, but his subordinate position in formal educational qualifications, these considerations might well have added a brittle edge to CSSRC anthropological endeavours in Sarawak.

ENGAGEMENTS WITH BRITISH ANTHROPOLOGY

Freeman needed British anthropology. He depended on the patronage of the British-based New Zealander, Firth; the South African-born, rising star Meyer Fortes who had moved to Cambridge where Freeman completed his PhD under his supervision; and the thoroughly English, but innovative and maverick Leach, who had an important influence on Freeman's early work. Freeman secured their support, with extraordinary diligence and his rich ethnographic materials on Samoa. Subsequently his detailed research among the Iban rewarded their confidence in him, and provided a smooth route, on his return to England, to registration for a PhD at Cambridge in 1950 with Fortes, the emerging doyen of kinship studies (p. 52). Freeman had departed academic pathways with Firth and the LSE; and distanced himself from Oxford. This was the culmination of Freeman's academic ambitions to receive due recognition in British anthropology. He could now go on to greater things.

His publications on the Iban demonstrated an imperious command of the main concerns of early post-war British anthropology and the structuralism of Fortes. This was not the response of a heretic at this stage. He was mainstream (1953). Freeman himself says that, had he stayed in Borneo and pursued his early concerns before his conversion to an interactionist paradigm, he "would have just been an ordinary social anthropologist" (p. 43). I am not convinced of this. Increasingly the Iban appeared to be an interlude in Freeman's passion for Polynesia and his developing interests in psychology and psychoanalysis (p. 53). Yet he returned to Sarawak in 1957–1958 to reinforce "the ordinary," but, he apparently had his paradigmatic conversion in his next revisit in 1961, which, in part, resulted in him not completing his major study of Iban religion. Had he completed it, would it have sealed his reputation in anthropology?

Any assessment of Freeman's Sarawak field research should acknowledge the role of Monica, whom he married in 1948; she later joined him in Sarawak in June 1949 and kept detailed diaries and produced exquisite line-drawings, portraits and sketches (Appell-Warren 2009). Freeman could always depend on Monica "to grant forgiveness for his failings and show a bemused tolerance" (p. 45). It is arguable that without her support and companionship he would not have accomplished what he did. In her diaries she revealed briefly the more domestic, soft side of her husband; but the other Derek also surfaced. "He had a tendency to lecture the Iban..."; [he] could fly into a temper when crises hit"; "Among the Iban he had a reputation for sternness"; Monica found she got a lecture when Derek was "impatient"; and "Derek seemed to expect her to provide the same sort of thoughts and advice as his own mother" (p. 50).

Following the completion of his doctorate Freeman returned to his homeland in January 1954. Although he was invited to remain in England in an academic post, he accepted a visiting lectureship at the University of Otago to fulfil his sponsorship obligations to the New Zealand government (p. 55). Otago was not part of Freeman's long-term ambitions. He then moved to a Senior Fellowship in Anthropology under Siegfried Nadel (as his "suppliant son," pp. 62–64) in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the Australian National University (ANU), where he arrived in February 1955. He remained there for the rest of his academic career rising to the position of Professor in the Research School of Pacific Studies and then retiring as Emeritus Professor. Yet in spite of his increasing dissatisfaction with the "rigidities" of British structuralism, he continued to plough this furrow in his publications on the Iban into the early 1960s.

THE KUCHING EVENT 1961 AND CONVERSION

Freeman's major published works on the Iban have endured, but he could have done much, much more. Nevertheless, as always, his reputation was somewhat tarnished by an incident in Kuching in 1961, when he revisited Sarawak to address serious problems which one of his research students, Brian de Martinoir had experienced in an abusive encounter with Tom Harrisson. Relations had deteriorated with Harrisson since Freeman's previous visit to Sarawak when Harrisson had verbally abused him and all anthropologists who had been involved in Sarawak (specifically Firth, Leach and Needham) (p. 74). Relations reached rock-bottom in 1961 when, during Harrisson's temporary absence from Kuching, Freeman gazed upon Dayak sculptures in the Museum and judged them to be "pornographic fakes," "lewd figures" commissioned by Harrisson. Freeman's conclusion (including his post-event rationalisation) was that Harrisson was a "psychopath," "charlatan," "madman in the pathological sense of the term" (p. 68, 74); Freeman, fuelled by his strong sense of morality, then smashed one of the carvings, subsequently went to Harrisson's house in his absence in search of further evidence of misdemeanours, walked in, rifled a locked drawer and photographed more "pornographic carvings" with a view to getting Harrisson ejected from Sarawak.

The story gets more convoluted; Freeman was then escorted to the airport by the police and put on a flight to Singapore, then he decided to go on to London to persuade the professor of psychological medicine at Edinburgh University to make a submission to the House of Commons with

the purpose of removing Harrisson from Sarawak. Freeman then changed his mind, disembarked in Karachi, and was examined by a psychiatrist; the Australian High Commissioner, concerned about Freeman's mental health and behaviour, contacted the ANU, with the result that Freeman's head of department, Professor John Barnes, flew to Karachi and brought Freeman home.

It is difficult to make sense of these events. Freeman's later explanation of the Kuching episode was that he had experienced "a cognitive abreaction: a sudden and deep realization of the inadequacy of the assumptions of contemporary anthropology" (p. 69). Quite how Freeman's assessment of Harrisson's "psychopathic" actions, his responses to them, and his revelation (or "illumination") about a new direction for anthropology connect are complex and difficult to fathom. Hempenstall explores, in a fascinating and intricate psychoanalytical journey, a possible explanation. Freeman had obviously gone through a "trauma," "a manic period of introspection," a "delusional experience"; in popular parlance "a nervous breakdown," but he gave to it "authenticity and life changing meaning" (pp. 69–78). A dispute over the interpretation and representations of Borneo cultures in 1961 occupies a vital place in Freeman's gradual withdrawal from Iban studies and his return to Samoa and his "fateful" encounters with Mead's study and the voices of American anthropology. It was also a most significant moment on which part of the recent history of anthropology turned. I think Hempenstall's evaluation of 1961 in Kuching has given us a plausible and balanced evaluation.

From then on J. D. Freeman became Derek Freeman and a new man, from British-trained structuralist to bio-cultural interactionist. He left Southeast Asia and the Iban behind, apart from a scattering of publications; two were reactions to publications by other anthropologists: a paper by Rodney Needham, which enabled Freeman to contest the Oxford school and carry forward his interactionist paradigm (1968); and to Jérôme Rousseau which provided a brief indication of the importance which Freeman attached to the biologically-given capacity of the human species to make choices, but was largely concerned with matters of social organisation and settling old scores (1981); then a review article of Erik Jensen's book on Iban religion (a revision of Jensen's Oxford DPhil thesis supervised by Needham) which again presented an opportunity for Freeman to question British structuralism, though in this review Freeman did not give expression to his alternative paradigm (1975); there were two further papers on Iban culture which began to give some indication of the results of Freeman's conversion (1967, 1979).

In the 1970s Freeman also supervised doctoral theses at the ANU on the Iban which did not provide any substantial evidence of the new paradigm (King 2017: 91). Taken overall the new “unified theory,” and Freeman’s metanoia, is difficult to detect in these disparate publications, other than that he had clearly substituted cultural determinism and the “dusty waterhole” of British structural-functionalist anthropology for an approach which involved the cross-disciplinary embrace of psychology, psychoanalysis and psychiatry along with evolutionary biology and ethology, and an exploration of “the psychological ramifications of unconscious symbolism” (p. 80).

“REMAKING HIMSELF”

Hempenstall presents a fascinating and compelling account and analysis of the process and consequences of Freeman’s Road to Damascus, and his spiritual conversion to the realisation of the possibility of a “unified theory” (p. 79–95); then his return to Samoa in the mid-1960s and his encounters with Mead (“the incubus”) Mead’s work and his engagements with her defenders which absorbs the reader in the second half of the book. Hempenstall’s book is a necessary rehabilitation of Freeman’s reputation, if only for the sake of his important studies of the Iban of Borneo and some of his work on Samoa; but he did not win every battle. It is a balanced account in that Hempenstall has not sought to “defend Freeman or his arguments,” though he has exposed his “frailties” (p. 8). In my view Hempenstall does rescue Freeman’s reputation to a significant degree. But Freeman’s work on Mead and Samoa is still mired in controversy. His major flaw as an academic was to refuse to walk away, to dominate and not to abandon an exchange until it was won and he had achieved a position of dominance (in academic debate it is never that simple). He was in pursuit of a scientific anthropology; he had an obsessional need to eliminate errors and to grapple with the possibility of failure. Yet it is sometimes important to be wrong and to acknowledge mistakes. Apparently, Freeman failed to recognise in the search for an overarching paradigm to explain the human condition that the search for truth is more troublesome and complex than it might appear; and that there are many sides to an argument depending on where, when and whom the anthropologist has studied. Yet his studies of the Iban of Sarawak have certainly stood the test of time, yet sad that his major study of religion never saw the light of day.

Victor T. King

Institute of Asian Studies, Universiti Brunei Darussalam

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