1962. The men of a hamlet unload bushowl eggs from a pole while visitors from other hamlets assist the distribution of the feast food, which includes cooked vegetables and betel nut (the branches in the foreground). The man seated in the foreground is the last member of Golito to have been invested with the insignia of the upper ranks of the political hierarchy, but he never held office.

LAKALALAI REVISITED

By ANN CHOWNING

Except for the few who have managed to work in areas virtually unaffected by Western civilization, ethnographers are all too familiar with a feeling of regret at not having been able to study a particular group even ten years earlier, before so much was abandoned or forgotten. Over and over, we are told, "It's too bad, So-and-so knew all about that, but he just died," or, "Yes, we used to do that when I was younger, but we know better now." Such experiences not only sharpen our awareness of the urgency of doing field work before it is too late, but may also make us think that once a culture has begun to discard part of its heritage under outside influence, it will continue to do so at a fairly steady rate. The process of change is, of course, of major interest in its own right. In recent years, a number of anthropologists have revisited people investigated earlier by themselves or others, and usually the major purpose of such a trip is to find out what has happened in the interim. Often the culture is hardly recognizable. Though many believe that relatively isolated cultures may remain static over long periods, such does not normally

FALL, 1966
1952. A girl's dowry is displayed at her puberty ceremony. It still consists wholly of traditional material—a basket, fiber bags, barkcloth, and shell knives.

seem to be the case when one group is forcibly subjected to another, especially when the dominant people are determined to impose their own ideas on those they govern. Generally speaking, the indigenous peoples of the Territory of Papua and New Guinea are in such a subordinate position. So, when I planned to return to Lakalaki after an absence of eight years, I fully expected to find changes that might seriously impede my task of completing a description of traditional social organization.

In 1954, I was one of several graduate students on a University of Pennsylvania expedition, led by Ward Goodenough, to the Lakalaki or West Nakanai of Cape Hoskins on the north coast of New Britain. That was my first period of extensive ethnographic field work, and I found it thoroughly enjoyable. After my previous brief experience on an Indian reservation where most people were not only anti-White but retained no more than tattered remnants of their own culture, the Lakalaki proved to their contacts with soldiers during World War II, they were embarrassingly fond of Americans. Despite more than thirty years of intensive European influence, much of their social organization was intact, especially in Gailo, the relatively conservative Methodist village which Goodenough and I investigated. They continued to grow or collect all of their own food, relying principally on taro, bush-fowl eggs, and shellfish. Although the need for money bought match and steel tools and consequently taxes meant most of the young men away to work for a period, when they came home they turned their wealth over to their elders to administer according to traditional patterns, and bride-price continued to be paid primarily in decorated spears and shields. Elaborate mortuary ceremonies were still carried out, as was a yearly ritual cycle in which masked figures paraded through the villages, sometimes chasing women and children. There were a variety of initiation rites, especially for first-born children. Although the Australian Government had forbidden such associated activities as the exhumation of human bones and rupu, the Lakalaki retained the essential parts of many modified or truncated ceremonies. What remained of the traditional culture was notably rich and impressive.

Nevertheless, we were always aware of how much had gone. Indeed, considering the outside influences to which they were subjected, the losses were hardly surprising. They had been governed by the Germans, the Australians, and, for a particularly memorable period, the Japanese. Rival Methodist and Roman Catholic missionaries had contested so bitterly for their souls that only brothers did not speak if they belonged to different churches. In going away to work, usually on coconut plantations but sometimes in Rabaul, the young men came into contact with people from all over New Guinea and had, as well, a chance to see, deal with, and try to understand a few Europeans other than patrol officers and missionaries. At home, they were variously instructed to cover their nakedness, bury their dead in cemeteries rather than houses, and bathe regularly; to live in consolidated villages, produce copra, and attend church; and to abstain from fighting, eating crocodile, and extramarital affairs. Only the last of these campaigns was a total failure. Lakalaki culture in 1954 was a mixture of old and new, fairly typical of New Guinea societies with similar histories. Along with warfare, much of the aboriginal political system had disappeared; not only did it depend on a man’s earning prestige as a warrior, but it was incompatible with the European systems of administration. Ceremonies centering around events such as puberty and marriage were becoming more attenuated or dropped out altogether, and the great canoe races had been abandoned. The principal god had retired to live quietly in his volcano, and mythology and ideas about life after death were a confusion of pagan and Christian elements.

The missions tried to break the power of the old men as repositories of essential knowledge ranging from sorcery to the manufacture of ceremonial paraphernalia, and had considerable success in persuading them to divulge their secrets to younger men or to the community at large. In contrast to some other Melanesian societies, this was not one in which the young men despised their elders and went their own way, but rather, the young men frequently stated, with regret, that they no longer knew or understood many of the things that the old men talked about, including the actual uses of the stones.

To the outsider, of course, the additions to the native culture were as conspicuous as the losses. Stone tools, which had long been replaced by steel, and though technology still remained exceedingly simple, each village at least contained a few flashlights, kerouane lamps, and bicycles. All the large and at least nominally Christians, and the children all attended mission schools. These were usually run by native teacher-missionaries, and education was rudimentary, consisting primarily of religious doctrine, instruction in reading and writing the official mission language (neither Lakalaki nor English), and simple arithmetic. As a result, the two missions varied greatly in their attitudes toward native culture, the Methodists being generally more tolerant of traditional values than the Catholics. Both, however, introduced a number of changes.

Innovations harder to spot than those of European origin included traits either acquired from foreign natives met at work or brought in by early missionaries from Polynesia and Fiji. These included sailing canoes, plaited mats, tattooing, songs and dances, and other techniques of love magic. Finding new crops such as sweet potatoes had reduced the threat of famine from drought; some medical care was offered by both the missions and the government; and men were no longer in danger of being speared if they ventured outside their villages.

By Melanesian standards, then, the Lakalaki were now healthy, well-fed, and relatively secure. But peace and safety meant little to Lakalaki men, who still adhered to a traditional system of values. Once they had taken enormous pride in their prowess as warriors and workers; suddenly, and inexplicably, they found themselves in a position of hopeless inferiority. This shift was not, on the whole, acceptable. They feeling that they were personally inferior or deserved their fate. On the contrary, they considered it unjust that Europeans should control admittedly highly desirable goods while the Lakalaki lived in poverty and subjection. For years, the majority of them had subscribed to a series of cargo cults, the leaders of which promised them in return for adherence to various new rules for conduct, supernatural access to European goods and the restoration of a supposed Golden Age in which they would be dominant. Although Gallo had resisted involvement in the cults, its residents shared feelings of grievances and the desire for a better life with the cult members. Nor were the government and the missions happy with the current state of affairs; they were intensifying their efforts to produce their own, and varying, versions of progress for the Lakalaki. All factors considered, it seemed unlikely that the situation we found in 1954 would remain static.

Nevertheless, I was hopeful and another visit would still be profitable. An attempt to return in 1958, following field work in Papua, was frustrated when the Cape Hoskins track was suddenly closed down, and not until 1962 was I able to get back to New Britain, financed by the Columbia University Council for Research in the Social Sciences. I had a number of reasons for wanting to see the Lakalaki again. During the trip, the four ethnographers on the original expedition—Goodenough, Charles and Edith Valentine, and myself—had pooled our information, with each one writing up different aspects of the culture. My primary responsibility was social organization, and in the course of writing, I inevitably found areas in which the data were inadequate, contradictory, or even lacking altogether when we had failed to ask questions that seemed obvious in retrospect but had not at the time. We were particularly ill-informed about some aspects of pre-contact political organization, as became apparent when Goodenough and I wrote a paper on the subject and undertook to do so. In addition, I had developed hypotheses and discovered apparent patterns in our material which seemed
to make sense, but which I was still eager to check with informants before claiming validity for them. I had also, in the interim, worked extensively in another Melanesian society, the Molima of the D'Entrecasteaux, and was now in a position to re-evaluate certain impressions, as of the relative status of Lakalaki women or the specific influences of particular Christian missions, against a more concrete background. Finally, on a purely personal level, I not only wanted to renew and freshen my acquaintance with the people and the culture, but to find out whether the Lakalaki still seemed as congenial and attractive as they had originally. Undoubtedly different anthropologists find different cultures particularly appealing—the reactions of members of the original expedition made that clear—and I had enjoyed the Lakalaki more than the Molima, amiable and cooperative though the latter were. It was possible, however, that I had been influenced more by the pleasures of first doing field work in a functioning and interesting culture than by the personalities of the Lakalaki themselves. At times, I was afraid that I might have ended up describing people who were at least partly of my own manufacture, and I hoped that contact with the real thing if it still existed, would either confirm my ideas about Lakalaki society or show me where to modify them.

At first glance, the Lakalaki area did look conspicuously different in 1962. Following the opening of the airstrip, an extensive European settlement had arisen at the west end of Cape Hoskins. A sawmill had been set up, and heavy vehicles moved over a new coastal road to collect timber from the east end, beyond Galilo. Government schools with European teachers had been established to supplement and replace the mission schools, and I was told that one had recently been opened in Galilo itself. Coca had been introduced as a new cash crop to supplement the production of copra, formerly the only local source of income for the villagers. The ten miles to Galilo seemed infinitely shorter in the patrol officer's Land Rover than it had by bicycle, and I hardly had time to be struck by the neat plank houses which had replaced sago thatch in the western villages before we had arrived at a large clearing which held the new government school just outside Galilo. Everything looked strange except the man standing on the doorstep of the teacher's house, holding the hand of a child whose hurt knee was being bandaged by the teacher. He was Kalau, one of our main informants and the assistant to Daris Swindler, the physical anthropologist on the expedition. I greeted him happily, only to meet with total non-recognition. (He told me later that he failed to recognize me because I had aged so; Lakalaki frankness in these matters tends to be a shock to those accustomed to the polite lie.) When I explained who I was, he went off to the village, and soon the teacher's house was surrounded by a crowd of Lakalaki eager to shake hands and to enquire about myself and other members of the 1954 group. Fortunately, the language came back to me as I listened; although I had to guess for words, I could communicate without undue humiliation. I had been afraid that I might have forgotten it almost completely, and the Lakalaki would have been as disappointed in me as I would have been ashamed of myself if I had had to carry out my investigations through the roundabout medium of Pilgrim English.

As soon as the other Europeans left, I was taken to the village, seated on a mat, and brought dinner of vegetables and bush-towl eggs. My best friend, they told me, was off collecting shellfish, but at dusk she came hurrying up and embraced me warmly, saying, "They told me on the beach, 'Your friend is in the village.' Why didn't you write?" Since my departure from Lakalaki, although accompanied by plentiful weeping, had also been notable for the many requests for my camping gear and complaints that now they would no longer have access to a supply of tobacco, I had been wary of believing that the Lakalaki felt much personal affection for me. The enthusiasm of my reception, even after they realized that I was no longer a source of free tobacco or other goods, convinced me that I had been unnecessarily suspicious. Immediately the villagers began to tell me the news of deaths, births, and marriages. The most important event was the recent death of Loua, a leading man of the village. As I showed them a photograph of him in an article written by Goodenough, the women present, including his widow, burst into the walls for the dead, sobbing over the picture and exclaiming, "Aha! my husband! alas, my brother!" Aghast at the furious I touched off, I finally managed to create a diversion with other pictures, and the rest of the evening passed more calmly in reminiscence.

The next morning, I made my first real tour of the village. Coco trees now shaded the main path through the coconut grove, cutting off the view from the sea with dense undergrowth. But the most immediate impression was of familiarity; the village itself had hardly changed. New houses had been built as the younger people married, but the division into six hamlets, each with its
men's house, remained. There were, however, many more ground-hosed long houses, often shared by two or more families. In 1954 the government was trying to persuade everyone to live in separate houses raised on piles, but the old people found them too draughty and often slept surreptitiously in their cook-houses. Now many of them were living openly in traditional style, and planks had not yet replaced thatch in this area. More surprising, however, was the discovery that polygyny had increased, with most of the polygynous marriages involving relatively young men. The Lakalai had always considered a second wife preferable to divorce, and in several of these recent cases, a man had ended a long-standing extramarital affair by marrying the woman. Whatever the overall significance of the shift (a colleague has suggested that it may result from increased wealth in the hands of the younger men), it at least shows that traditional attitudes toward marriage are retained by the non-Catholics.

Making a quick census, I struggled to identify everyone who appeared. My greatest difficulties were with those who had been children in 1954; frequently I could recognize a child born after my departure as a member of a particular family, while failing to recognize his older brother who had now grown up. To my relief, many of the old people were not only still alive but healthy and active, though the leading traditional artists, from whom I had hoped to obtain paintings, was now almost blind and had passed on his duties to his stepson. People frequently spoke sorrowfully of how they had aged, pointing to their white hair, their wrinkles, and their gnarled fingers.

(Left) Old Vall, apparently on her last legs in 1954. (Right) In 1962, seemingly unaffected by the years, she is minding a great-grandchild and a grandchild.

(Left) Tovuli, father of Bato, and his favorite grandchild, Harelna, in 1954. (Right) In 1962, despite bad eyesight, Tovuli helps adorn Harelna for a special ceremony (out of the sum of required ceremonies) to celebrate her breast development. He is sponsoring the ceremony and pays.

(Left) Parade, in the garden in 1954, strips off bark with which to tie up a bundle. (Right) Parade, in 1962, with the younger of her two children. (Her husband also has another wife, but Parade has quarreled with her and lives in a separate house.)

(Left) Harelna, in 1954, sitting on the lap of her aunt, Mapi. (Right) Harelna, in 1962, with a visiting cousin, adorned to celebrate her breast development. (My camera equipment in the background.)
1962. A few of the younger Galilo children play on a copra drying platform. I was instructed to teach the two on the left (who are double first cousins) to collect mussels in the mangrove swamps.

1962. Children dancing together. They are all first cousins, the offspring of four brothers and sisters.

hairs or missing teeth, but simultaneously introduced with great pride their youngest children or grandchildren. Even in 1954, despite a noticeable gap in the age group that would have been born during the Japanese occupation, Galilo had been swarming with children, but now the numbers were fantastic. The population had grown from 265 to 333, and only half a dozen of these represented foreign women married in, the rest of the increase being composed of children under eight. Not a single woman had married outside the village in that period. There were, however, numerous absences. More children were attending outside schools, including, for the first time, girls. A number of men, one or two with their families, were away working for Europeans, and several young couples were missionaries in nearby areas. Balancing the absences, however, was the presence of several men I had heard about but never met, including the husband of my best friend, who had been away at work in 1954. Although these strangers were a little stiff and wary at first, the fact that I was on free and easy terms with their kinmen loosened their reserves, and soon they were behaving like old friends themselves.

It was a shock to see girls I had known as carefree teenagers now settled matrons, each the mother of several children. Equally startling was the sobriety of those who had been young married men, then still indulging their privileges of wandering and philandering, but now the heads of large families and taking on new stature as potential Big Men. Our houseboy in 1954 was Sege, a gay young blade with a large number of

(Left) Vava, in 1954, feeds coconuts to a grandchild. (Right) In 1962, she jokes about the tobacco I have just given her. Vava is a noted specialist in recognizing souls stolen by ghosts.

(Left) Lalio, in 1954, with a younger girl, dressed for a dance. (Right) Lalio, in 1962, sitting with her own children and the children of her co-wife.

(Left) Sege, a carefree young man in 1954. (Right) In 1962, now a responsible father, with the second of his three children.
relinquishing another older brother, a cripple, was unable to take on.

Leadership, and its relation to political organization, was one of the subjects I was most interested in, and the most important results of the return trip emerged from further questioning on these matters. We had thought that the "Big Men," hamlet leaders who attained their position primarily by accumulating wealth and giving feasts, and whose activities were relatively unaffected by the Australian system of government, were the highest officials in the traditional society, though we knew that their roles had altered somewhat with the abolition of warfare. But we had been troubled by references to the peculiarly exalted status of the heads of certain descent groups or sibs and of men ceremonially invested with certain ornamental wristbands, and it was clear that we did not know enough about relations between different villages, including warfare. After several frustrating days in which I tried to untangle apparently contradictory statements, I found myself suddenly realizing what I was after and began to describe an aboriginal system of wholly unexpected complexity. In the past, prominent hamlet leaders had been invested with a particular type of wristband, the wearing of which empowered them to break up fights within the village. Certain men of this grade who were both outstanding warriors and members of sibs which held land in the village area were elevated to still higher status, with responsibilities that cut across hamlet lines and a particular duty to act as war leaders. Finally, the most notable member of this last group was elected village chief, forbidden ever to handle weapons again but given extraordinary authority to settle internal quarrels and to represent the village in its dealings with outsiders. Elected village chiefs are a real rarity in Melanesia, and we had never suspected that such an office existed in Lakalai. We had, however, been puzzled as to why the first official appointed by European administrators in Galiloo seemed to have been so respected, since such officials are often mere figureheads, and the problem was solved when it developed that he was the elected chief before the Europeans arrived. The shock of discovering that we had missed so much was alleviated by the pleasure of seeing that the baffling descriptions finally fitted together and made sense.

In other respects, our initial work proved to have been much more satisfactory. Some hypotheses required modifications; for example, in working out the basic dichotomy between the human world and the domain of spirits, I had assumed that domestic animals fell within the human sphere. But when, in 1962, I met a dog on a path and idly asked it where it was going, my shocked companion exclaimed, "The evil spirit!" and told me that dogs and pigs are under the control of spirits who punish anyone who jokes with or about them. For example, if a dog comes into the men's house in the morning covered with dew, the men must not ask it facetiously where it has been or if it has caught a pig in the bush, lest a spirit rush in in the form of a wild pig and attack them. Explanations of this sort, along with those revealing that turnips, the staple crop, was personified and must be treated with respect, forced me to revise my neat scheme and put domestic animals and cultivated plants into an intermediate category of things which could not turn into dangerous spirits, as could wild animals and plants, but which were not wholly under human control either.

In retrospect, too, I felt that I had tended to exaggerate the more bizarre aspects of relations between the sexes. Most notably, Lakalai men use considerable physical violence toward women, who counter with verbal insults, the deadliest of which refer to a man's defeating. Curses of this sort can drive a man to suicide, and the whole society has wide-ranging effects on daily behavior. Nevertheless, attitudes were not always so clear-cut or extreme as I had been assuming. Furthermore, I found, as might have been expected, that the usual male comments about the inferiority of women were tempered by recognition of this in the society that these women are the preservers of the matrilineal descent groups. But I did conclude that though the status of Lakalai women might be high judged against the usual stereotype of Melanesian society, in which women are depicted as beasts of burden, doing all the hard work and excluded from the rich ceremonial life which in 1962 and 1963 was being enjoyed by the elderly men who no longer were. women were usually inferior in status to those of Molinta, and probably at about the same level as women in several other Melanesian societies which have been thoroughly described. My initial reaction, when I was over-impressed by female participation in ostensibly masculine affairs, really reflected the fact that in 1962 and 1963 I was simply not making inaccurate generalizations about Melanesia. These, however, were comparatively minor points. After again seeing the culture in operation, I finally felt sure that I had not made up the Lakalai. There is, of course, always a danger that an anthropologist will find what he expects to find, and that the quality of my attempts to cross-check, complete with enthusiastic cries of "You understand us so well!" was at least enough to settle my own doubts. Not
only did the people behave as I expected them to, but I found them as congenial as ever, so that my stay was thoroughly enjoyable on all counts.

For the whole time, however, I continued to be amazed at the apparent timelessness of the place. The lapse of time gave me an opportunity to get considerably more reliable data on such matters as residence patterns, birth rate, and the stability of marriage, than could have been obtained in an initial fairly short stay in the field. There were also matters that I could pursue more deeply after having analyzed and thought about the material. But I really felt that, with the exceptions of the advantages conferred by any break between field trips, we would have been able to do the same work and get the same data in 1962 as in 1954. Subsistence patterns were completely unchanged; cacao production had only slightly increased the flow of European goods into the community. Within five weeks, I attended three traditional feasts honoring children, including a girl's puberty rite, and traditional hamlet organization under the direction of Big Men was fully displayed at each. At their scheduled time, masked figures began to appear in the villages, parading around and chasing the children. Galilo was observing a series of rituals in mourning for Louis's death, and his widow showed me the mourning costume that she had just discarded. I checked on details of myths and tales recorded in 1911 by a missionary who had met some Lakaalis, and the people not only confirmed or corrected them but deluged me with additional traditional stories, which they acted out with fervor. The government school had not yet had time to take effect, especially since the teacher refused to learn Pigidin and none of the children spoke English. The sound of tractors on the road, the frequent presence of other Europeans in the vicinity, and the large new Catholic mission located nearby, all seemed incongruous in the otherwise completely familiar scene. It seemed as though the forcible encounter between Lakaali and European culture had, prior to 1954, produced a unique amalgamation which could continue with little alteration until and unless new and powerful factors entered the picture. Whatever the ambitions of the missions and the patrol officers for the Lakaalis, they had, to date, been presented in too familiar a guise. Suspicion of the motives of all officials may have contributed to Lakaali conservatism, a feeling that they should cling to what they had because nothing that others offered them looked any better. Because of the liberalization of government policy during this period, a matter of which they were hardly aware, they were no longer so likely to be forced to accept innovation from the outside, and so far they had developed no radical practical schemes of their own. The accumulation of work experience had not produced any notable advance in sophistication and knowledge of the outside world, except among a scattering of young men who were not yet influential in the community.

Those few children who went on to government schools returned to Lakaali, if at all, only for brief vacations; in fact, fear of losing contact with their children inhibited some parents from allowing them to go off to school. My observations, of course, applied only to Galilo. Not having the confidence of the Catholics with whom the Valentinides worked, I can only report that, according to my informants, the latest cargo cult was continuing as before. Although by no means content with their lot, the Lakaalis seemed reluctant to try alternatives. They simply maintained a hope that someone would appear who would show them how to gain European goods and prestige quickly. To most, other goals did not seem worth striving for.

Nevertheless, the end of the period of apparent stagnation was already in sight. Cape Hoxkins contains some of the richest land in the islands, and it is also, despite the present birthrate, very much underpopulated. The administration is intent on acquiring some of the native land, partly to cut timber on, partly to resettle Tokai people from the crowded area around Rabaul. Government schools will eventually provide education far superior to that long supplied by the local missions. Specialists of various kinds are being sent to the area, so that the patrol officer no longer has to handle all matters singlehanded, and plentiful advice is available for cooperatives and cash cropping. However, the most important thing may be the government-sponsored schemes, most Lakaalis are eager for education and a higher income, and there is little doubt that the next few years will bring more changes than perhaps the whole period since World War II. In 1964, while flying across New Britain, I met at the Cape Hoxkins airstrip a young man from Galilo whom I remembered as a child of ten, fully painted and adorned for participation in a traditional mortuary ceremony. Given a chance at outside education because his father was a native medical assistant, he now was one of the first two natives from Papua and New Guinea, the House of Assembly, and three of the seven candidates for the West New Britain seat were from Lakaali. Tokai are beginning to settle at the east end of the area, and the Lakaali there had received large cash payments for the land they had sold. The old ways still persisted—In Galilo I found a young widow incarcerated for mortuing in a dark cubicle, a custom I had thought long dead—but many of them seemed unlikely to last much longer. I feel unable to predict the exact direction of future changes, which will depend much on the constant shifts in official policy and on the specific individuals administering it as on the Lakaalis themselves, but I am sure that if I return to Galilo after another eight years, I will really find the transformations that were so conspicuously absent in 1962.

SUGGESTED READING