
Beatty, Andrew. 2015. *After the Ancestors. An Anthropologist's Story*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. xix + 372 pp. Pb.: \$29.99. ISBN: 9781107477407

A beautiful and intriguing masterpiece by Andrew Beatty, *After the Ancestors* is set on a remote island in Indonesia, on Sumatra's coast line where a young anthropologist and his wife for two years were living among the Nias people in a small village called Orahua and studying their lives.

Andrew Beatty's fieldwork was conducted in the 1980s when the people of the small village were navigating a meaningful time of change in their history. The elders of the village could still remember the times of headhunting and tribal religion in which several gods were worshiped and spirits of ancestors were held in honour by perpetuating them in wooden sculptures. However, the new generation was living under Christian rules. Beatty moves among orators and churchmen, people of different tribes, to learn their ways of communicating, celebrating, giving and receiving gifts.

The book is not a regular anthropological analysis; rather it is a story, a narrative. It introduces the reader to several villagers whom Beatty describes in such a way that the reader feels present in the scene. Beatty writes about the speeches that orators of Orahua villages give on many occasions, which is an important part of this culture, such as arguing bride prices, solving big and small arguments, and reacting to moments of sadness, such as the death of the village chief. Beatty writes how he tries to become accepted by the villagers, he organises a traditional feast called *owasa* with the help of a few of the villagers, which lead to the inclusion of him and his wife in two of the tribes, he becomes part of the family that brings out many different events, mostly concerning the tradition of gift exchange that Beatty is researching. Since his goal is to learn as much as possible, he even learns traditional Nias martial arts, the lessons are happening in secret, and Beatty writes about them in several chapters describing his teacher and learning mate, an incomer from another village. He becomes so engaged in the life there that the result, the book, gives the reader very deep insights of the ways people live there, even secret ones, like initiation rites which Andrew Beatty goes through after completing his martial art studies.

The anthropologist is an eyewitness not only to everyday activities but also to events that do not happen every day. During his stay in Orahua, the chief of the village falls ill, so part of the book narrates his struggle to get better; Beatty shows what it takes to get help from others. Since Beatty stays in a house owned by the chief, he is near all the time and can write about his personality and influence on people around him. Eventually, the chief dies and Beatty describes the political fight between the family members to take his place. This shows a small part of the system of the government and how corruption works and what money can achieve even in Indonesia's most remote places.

The book is not only about the local people but also about Andrew Beatty, who is learning to live like them: eating, bathing, fighting, talking, and acting in their way. He reconstructs his conversations with the locals about different topics, their genealogies, traditions and even local gossip. Beatty writes how he and his wife feels living among Nias people; he puts on paper his ideas on how to interact better with locals and what the

results are. This personal touch of positioning himself (Beatty) as one of the characters of the book offers a valuable perspective that will inspire any new anthropologist. His comments and thoughts reveal the inner workings of his fieldwork, such as the milestones a researcher has to navigate and the methods one uses to draw closer to people and even become one of them, as Beatty admits at the end of his book.

If *After the Ancestors* is read for scientific purposes, it will not offer any in-depth analyses or comments from the author, as mentioned above it is more a narrative than scientific writing. However, the book can give a basis for the reader's own analysis; there is enough qualitative and detailed information on how things are happening in Orahua. Readers interested in a more scientific approach to anthropological fieldwork should refer to Beatty's earlier work for further reading or research purposes.

This book is valuable not only for scientific purposes but also for any person interested in learning about the everyday lives of Indonesian villagers since the style of writing is narrative and is very close to a great novel; it shows amazing scenes of people lives that a short visit to Indonesia would not provide.

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