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The book is comprised of three parts of uneven length. In the first part (pp. 3–29), the author discusses his method of investigation and his objectives and presents general ethnographical information about the Mbuti Pygmies. He makes it quite clear that he chose a technique of “close identification and integration between myself and the Epulu-hunters” (p. 10) that made it impossible for him “not to take sides” (p. 10). He also takes great care in justifying his intensive study of the Epulu band which happened to be in a somewhat special type of contact both with villagers and Europeans around Camp Putnam. The second part (pp. 33–89) deals with relationships between the Epulu band and the villagers (mostly of Bira, Ndaka, and Ngwana origin). The author confesses that some of the more interpretive parts of the work are one-sided because of the very techniques he used and feels “an urgent need to conduct further field work, taking the village standpoint” (p. 11). The third part (pp. 93–300) examines the Pygmies in their forest environment: the structure of the band, the life cycle, the economy, internal and external government, and religion. The analysis culminates in Chapters 15 and 16 with a recapitulation of principles of organization both in the forest and village contexts.

The book is illustrated by a large number of illuminating maps, charts, and tables, some of which lack sufficient explanation to be readily comprehensible. It further contains 42 most instructive, excellent photographs, contrasted by an unimpressive glossary of terms (pp. 363–366) used by the Epulu Pygmies (including a fairly sizable amount of words of Kingwana origin [Swhilil], some identified as such, some not). An extensive bibliography on Pygmies and theoretical issues is offered at the end of the book. Of what use previous Pygmy studies were for Turnbull’s work escapes me, since little reference is made to them in the text and since few if any data seem to be drawn from them.

This is an impressive, well-written, though not particularly concise book. I find that many statements are repetitious and that the interpretive parts could have been more cogently expressed. The wealth of highly valid and original ethnographical data on the Epulu Pygmies (Chapters 8–14) forms the most convincing part of the work. The interpretations show deep insight into Pygmy values and patterns of thinking. This insight is absent from the discussion of the principles of organization of the villagers. Many remarks about the villagers show either bias toward or inadequate knowledge of them. The much needed reassessment of the nature of the relationships between Pygmies and non-Pygmmy groups would have to take into account not merely other bands (net hunters and archers) but also the multiple cultural and social distinctions prevailing among villagers in the Ituri region. The Belgian Colonial Government has manipulated the social systems of these villages considerably but has only minimally affected the social systems of the Pygmies. This differential impact must have necessarily influenced the nature of the presently existing Pygmy-village relationship. The main thesis of the book is that the Pygmies—the Epulu Pygmies, I suppose, for it seems to me that the author never fully clarifies the extent to which his data and interpretations are applicable to all Pygmies—are not an economically, politically, ritually dependent people (p. 34), or rather that they are not in a position of necessary dependence (p. 37). As summed up (p. 300), “the nature of the relationships is one of opposition,” and “Mbuti society, in response to the demands of the situation or by fortuitous chance, meets it with an organization based upon the very antithesis of village organization.” It seems quite acceptable that the relationship cannot be characterized in terms of symbiosis or subordination and certainly not in terms of assimilation. But it is questionable whether the qualification of “opposition” is any more useful to cover the complex Mbuti-villagers’ relationships, which include not merely factors of incompatibility but also of intimacy, personal attachment, continuity, cooperation, effective exchange of goods, hereditary kpara links and karé brotherhood. There is also the fact that the Mbuti depend heavily on crops and many other commodities which are produced by the villagers, e.g., “Younger Mbuti do not know what they would do without the machete for cutting saplings... The older men say that if they did not have machetes... they would use stone tools, but they have no knowledge of all of how to make such tools” (p. 37). Further clarifications would certainly have to be found, e.g., in the villagers’ conceptions about territory, in their “respect for the anteriority of the Mbuti in the forest” (p. 41), and in “the mutually accepted territorial separation” (p. 86).

The analysis of such aspects as fluidity of band structure, structural significance of territory and age, the social value of quietness and noise, and the spiritual role of the forest, is most illuminating. The contributions made by the author on these issues, together with the general ethnographic data on Mbuti economy, government, life cycle, and religion, cannot fail to leave a lasting imprint on comparative studies and on anthropological theory.