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CONTENTS

HOWARD MORPHY

- Aesthetics in a Cross-Cultural Perspective:
Some Reflections on Native American Basketry 1-16

Review Article

PAUL DRESCH

- Ethnography and General Theory or People Versus
Humankind 17-36

SHAHIN BEKHRADNIA

- The Decline of the Zoroastrian Priesthood and Its Effect on the
Iranian Zoroastrian Community in the Twentieth Century ... 37-47

SELINA CHING CHAN

- Some Brief Reflections on Structural Continuity
in Chinese Peasant Society 49-56

Review Article

DAVID PARKIN

- Unpacking Anthropology 57-65

Book Reviews

- DEBORAH B. GEWERTZ and FREDERICK K. ERRINGTON, *Twisted
Histories, Altered Contexts: Representing the Chambri
in a World System.*
Reviewed by Michael O'Hanlon 67-70

- ROBERT W. HEFNER, *The Political Economy of Mountain Java:
An Interpretive History.*
Reviewed by R. H. Barnes 70-71

- RONALD INDEN, *Imagining India.*
Reviewed by Marcus Banks 71-74

- JULIA LESLIE (ed.), *Roles and Rituals for Hindu Women.*
Reviewed by Graham Dwyer 75-76

Book Reviews (continued)

JUNE MCDANIEL, <i>The Madness of the Saints: Ecstatic Religion in Bengal.</i> Reviewed by David N. Gellner	76-78
JOHN EADE and MICHAEL J. SALLNOW (eds.), <i>Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage.</i> Reviewed by Jeremy MacClancy	78-79
MALCOLM BULL and KEITH LOCKHART, <i>Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-day Adventism and the American Dream.</i> Reviewed by Steve Bruce	79-80
PETER G. FORSTER, <i>T. Cullen Young: Missionary and Anthropologist.</i> Reviewed by W. S. F. Pickering	81-82
MARGARET JOLLY and MARTHA MACINTYRE (eds.), <i>Family and Gender in the Pacific: Domestic Contradictions and the Colonial Impact.</i> Reviewed by Anthony Simpson	82-84
JAMES L. WATSON and EVELYN S. RAWSKI (eds.), <i>Death Ritual in Late Imperial and Modern China.</i> Reviewed by Mareile Flitsch	84-86
JONATHAN HAAS (ed.), <i>The Anthropology of War.</i> Reviewed by Tony Ashworth	86-88
<i>Comment</i>	
Elizabeth Edwards and Terence Wright on <i>Jenness and Malinowski: Fieldwork and Photographs</i>	89-93
Publications Received	94-98
Contributors to this Issue	inside back cover

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AESTHETICS IN A CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE: SOME REFLECTIONS ON NATIVE AMERICAN BASKETRY

HOWARD MORPHY

Introduction

WRITING in 1904, Otis T. Mason begins his compendious work on American Indian basketry with a reflection (or perhaps more truly a lack of reflection!) on the newly awakened interest of that ubiquitous follower of ethnographic fashion, the private collector:

In the past few years a sympathetic spirit has been awakened in the United States to keep alive this charming aboriginal art and to preserve its precious relics. In every State in the Union will be found rich collections, both in public and private museums. People of wealth vie with one another in owning them. It almost amounts to a disease, which might be called 'canastromania'. They resemble the 'merchantman seeking goodly pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.' The genuine enthusiasm kindled in the search, the pride of success in the acquisition, the care bestowed upon them,

This is an expanded version of a chapter (Morphy 1992a) written originally for a catalogue of an exhibition to be held at the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford, from 16 June 1992 to May 1993, entitled *Basketmakers: Meaning and Form in Native American Baskets*. I am grateful to the editors of JASO for encouraging me to produce this fuller version of the text and to Jeremy Coote, Frances Morphy, Linda Mowat and Penny Dransart for forcing me, by their critical comments, to clarify the arguments of earlier versions.

witness that the basket is a worthy object of study. The story is told of a distinguished collector who walked many weary miles to the shelter of a celebrated old weaver. He spent the day admiring her work, but still asking for something better. He knew that she had made finer pieces. At last flattery and gold won. She tore out the back of her hut, and there, hid from mortal eyes, was the basket that was to be burned at her death. Nothing could be more beautiful, and it will be her monument. (Mason 1988: vii-ix)

The paragraph would provide an excellent text for a critical sermon on ethnographic museums, the presuppositions of early twentieth-century collectors of ethnography and primitive art, the post-colonial context of production, the inequalities in the relationship between Native Americans and the colonial admirers of their artefacts, and any number of other themes. The text is so redolent with the assumptions of the time that it is hard to resist littering the quotation with parenthetical 'sic's and exclamation marks. One cannot help hoping that as soon as the collector left, the basketmaker replaced the missing basket with the next one in line for burning. However, as with any text that presents so clearly the presuppositions of its times, it is too easy to treat it unfairly and ahistorically, as if it were written today.

The themes that I want to take up here are as controversial today as they were at the time Mason was writing. They concern whether objects of other cultures should be presented as aesthetic forms or as art, and the extent to which presentation as art involves a distortion or appropriation of value. Underlying these themes is the question of the relationship between the aesthetic qualities of an object as viewed by its Western public and its aesthetic qualities as viewed by its producer, which question in turn has embedded within it the general issue of the usefulness, and even the validity, of the notion of aesthetics for cross-cultural analysis.¹

James Clifford (1991: 241) has written that 'one of the most effective current ways to give cross-cultural value (moral and commercial) to a cultural production is to treat it as art'. Mason's writing is clearly part of this process and illustrates particularly well the linkage between what Clifford refers to as the moral and commercial dimensions of value. The value (as 'a worthy object of study') is proved by the interest of the collector, who is prepared to invest large sums in acquiring an object of beauty or aesthetic value. The basket on the pedestal in the museum becomes the ultimate monument to its creator. On the other hand, in his radically sub-titled essay, 'Toward an Anti-Catalogue of Woodsplint Basketry', Russell Handsman (1987: 147) notes: 'when seen as art, artifacts [are] separated

1. A relevant debate took place in 1986 over *Art and Land*, an exhibition at the South Australian Museum, Adelaide, in which a set of Aboriginal direction signs from central Australia were exhibited deliberately as 'art' (see Jones and Sutton 1986, Brook 1986, and Sutton 1987; the debate is summarized in Taylor 1988). Susan Vogel's (1991) account of multi-perspective exhibitions of ethnographic objects considers similar issues in the case of African 'art'.

from their human, historical, and political relations'. As they stand, the two perspectives are not necessarily incompatible but, rather, depend on the particular concept of art applied. Certainly, it could be argued, as Handsman does, that the exhibition of ethnographic objects as 'art' often involves the imposition of a nineteenth-century Western European concept, whose application incorporates the objects of other cultures within the framework of Western European values and blocks understanding of their indigenous meaning and cultural context. Moreover, the concept of 'art' can mask the process by which the object was acquired: 'basket diverted by flattery and gold from funeral pyre' is unlikely to be part of the label. These dangers are certainly there in the aestheticization of the works of other cultures. However, I would argue that the fault lies not just in the overall context of exhibitions, but also in the particular concept of aesthetics employed. An exhibition may use the concept of art as a means of focusing attention on a set of objects in a way that asserts the value of the products of another culture, and yet simultaneously draw attention to the wider context of the objects in their indigenous frame. Used reflexively, the exhibition of ethnography as 'art' may involve a repositioning of the concept of art itself, moving it away from its nineteenth-century meanings towards one that is more relevant to the particular cross-cultural discourse concerned.

The incorporation of things within a unitary category of objects that are defined as 'art', and which are to be viewed together as an exclusive set specifically for their aesthetic effect, is what appropriates their cultural value and history and subordinates them to Western values. If, rather than seeing aesthetics as referring to this unitary category of objects, we see it as a dimension that any object can potentially possess, then the danger of imposing one set of values over others can be avoided. Instead, we may be able to enter into a cross-cultural discourse about the aesthetic potential of objects. Handsman is certainly right to say that such a discourse requires more than the display of objects on a pedestal in a particular light, and, indeed, more than the simple presentation of the objects. Such an impoverished and narrow conception of the way in which the aesthetic dimension of an object can be appreciated is an imposition of taste that narrows, rather than opens up, the possibilities of cross-cultural appreciation. Handsman and McMullen (1987: 34) go so far as to suggest that 'when presented and interpreted as art, splint baskets were not, and cannot be, "read" as artifacts of specific societies'. However, by identifying aesthetics and art with nineteenth-century values they may be falling into a trap: by defining art and aesthetics ethnocentrically they deny the possibility of their existence in other cultures. By creating the category 'art' in relation to a particular kind of non-functional aesthetic display valuable, associated with what Brook (1986) refers to as the 'gemstone' model of art, our predecessors appropriated not simply the objects that were put into that category but also the concept of art itself. For a while, 'art' became limited to a certain category of objects. This definition is not only subject to an anthropological critique, but was also subject to criticism from Western 'art' producers.

Art across Cultures

The word 'art' defies simple definition. Historically, 'art' can best be treated as a number of different words whose meaning varies depending on who is using the term and when. But it is possible to suggest some core components that seem to be common to most of its usages. The defining characteristics of art objects, or of the artistic dimension of objects, tend to include references to their aesthetic properties, to their effect on the senses, and to their expression of meaning and value. While not all objects labelled as art share every one of these characteristics, they tend to form part of a polythetic set with overlapping attributes. The narrow Western definition of art, with its category of 'set-aside' objects, is misleading because it has appropriated many of the more general ideas that lie behind the concept, and because it has added so many irrelevant exclusion clauses. Art objects become objects that have no other function, or are the product of individual creativity, or are defined according to innumerable other criteria that were signs of the myths of a particular period of history and a particular ideology, whether free-enterprise capitalism or socialist realism.

Guss (1989) addresses this issue in a rich analysis of the basketry of the Yekuana, a people of the Upper Orinoco River in Venezuela. He argues that while the Yekuana do not have a word for art, they do distinguish between works that are manufactured within the guidelines of traditional design, *tidi'uma*, and the mass of goods that they acquire through trade, *mesoma*, the latter word remaining 'a synonym for any insipid or alien object' (ibid.: 69). *Tidi'uma*, on the other hand, combine, in their manufacture, raw materials and use, a fusion of symbolic elements and functional values. In making and using them, individuals continually recreate the cultural values and physical and metaphysical processes of which they are a part:

to become a mature Yekuana is not only to develop the physical skills demanded of one's gender, but also the spiritual awareness that the preparation of these goods imparts. In a society that has no special category for a work of 'art', there can be no object that is not one. Or put another way, to become a true Yekuana is to become an artist. (ibid.: 70)

At first sight, Guss's analysis seems to contain a paradox: he begins by stating that the Yekuana have no word for art and yet ends up by stating that to become a true Yekuana is to become an artist. Is there simply a lexical gap in Yekuana that is filled by the English term? Is Guss writing rhetorically? Or is this simply a case of muddled thinking? The answer is, most likely, none of these, but lies in the problem of cultural relativism and the limitations of ordinary language, though rhetoric too may play a part. From a cultural-relativist perspective, concepts are defined according to the particular context in which they occur: it is not anticipated that the concept of 'art' will be any different from such concepts as 'marriage', or a 'relative', or 'conception', in that they all vary cross-culturally. Yet the very fact that we are applying the terms and seeking the equivalent concepts across cultures

implies that we have a more general concept that transcends the particular case and is part of the anthropologist's metalanguage. What Guss is saying, then, is that what he understands by, or defines as, the concept of art is found in something of the activities of every Yekuana. By definition, that concept could not be, or should not be, identical to the Western European concept of art, since that concept in turn will be relative to its cultural context and hence be culture-bound.² The metaconcept is related to the Western concept because anthropologists begin their comparative enterprise from their own culture, and in its recent origins, at least, anthropology is a Western science. The concept should be defined independently of, but necessarily with reference to, the ordinary-language usage of the word 'art'.

The situation is, though, even more complex than this. The Western concept of art is itself a many-headed monster, the definition of which analysts and theoreticians struggle continually to change. Indeed, the 'arts' of non-Western peoples, folk art and Oriental art have all been used by artists as part of their intra-cultural dialogue attempting to inspire Western practice and change Western concepts. Thus the analyses that anthropologists or art historians make of the arts of other cultures can, in turn, have consequences for Western art: *unlike the Yekuana, Western artists are attuned to seeing aesthetic value in other peoples' cultural products*. The presentation of Yekuana basketry as 'art', the assertion that it has an aesthetic dimension, that it is a sculptural form, is both a challenge to the Western category of art and, at the same time, if it is successful, something that results in a broadening of the category.³ The Western category of art, responds to criticism anaconda-like, by swallowing it whole. It is broad in ways that the Yekuana category is narrow. The Yekuana do not recognize any cultural value in objects introduced from outside for functional purposes. Western cultures, on the other hand, consume through aesthetics the objects of other cultures and discard their functions. The basket becomes a 'sculptural form', no longer a container for grain or a plate for cassava. This paradox has something to do with economic processes and the articulation of modes of production, but also has much to do with cultural differences. Whatever the cause, one of the consequences has been that while people of the Fourth World (see Graburn 1976) stop producing baskets

2. The perspective on the comparative method developed by Marilyn Strathern (1988: 8) is very relevant to the cross-cultural study of art: 'Comparative procedure, investigating variables across societies, normally decontextualizes local constructs in order to work with context-bound analytic ones. The study of symbolic systems presents a different problematic.... The task is not to imagine one can replace exogenous concepts by indigenous counterparts; rather the task is to convey the complexity of the indigenous concepts in reference to the particular context in which they are produced. Hence I choose to show the contextualized nature of indigenous constructs by exposing the contextualized nature of analytical ones.' Indeed, I would argue that one of the main achievements of the anthropology of art has been to pose questions about the Western category and concept of art and to expose its contextualized nature.

3. The corollary of this is that Western art history must also be, in Sutton's (1987) term, 'additive'.

and replace them with plastic containers and recycled products from the industrialized world (which they may or may not value aesthetically), the institutions of the industrialized world exhibit Fourth World products as works of art and increase their 'value'.

Exhibiting Art

When trying to persuade a Western public of the aesthetic dimension of other peoples' material culture, anthropologists present their arguments not only through their writings, but also by organizing exhibitions of other peoples' work as art. And as we have seen, it is in the context of the art gallery that the Western definition of art and the anthropological metaconcept of art have the opportunity to get almost inextricably muddled. As Luke Taylor (1988: 93) has written:

why is it that we find objects from other cultures so beautiful, even though we know that at some level, the aesthetic values objectified in the work must be culturally specific? Clearly, an emphasis on the culture-specific quality of aesthetic values is not sufficient to describe the complexity of the situation.

There are two reasons why exhibition as art became an almost inevitable part of anthropologists' presentation of their case. First, part of the metadefinition of art involves aesthetics, and one of the Western ways of communicating the aesthetic properties of an object is through exhibition. Secondly, part of the cultural-relativist agenda is to signify the essential equivalence of world cultures by a metaphysical criterion of equal cultural value. Value in this context is intra-cultural: it is created in each case in terms of the cultural system of which it is a part. The cultural relativist demonstrates the equivalence of this difference by explicating the values of the particular culture in terms of its own processes of reproduction, by drawing attention to analogous processes operating in other cultural contexts, by using rhetorical devices that assert that objects or processes of similar value exist in different cultures, and by showing that it is possible for a member of one culture to appreciate value as it exists for a member of another through a process of cultural translation. In this context, 'art' is used as a rhetorical device to carry over to the objects and ultimately to the agents of 'other' cultures the connotations of art as high cultural value. They produce objects of 'art', therefore they are of equal value to us, even though the 'art' they produce is different. In the former case, rather than asserting the equivalence of value, the anthropologist is arguing that, from a cross-cultural perspective, value is value-neutral. In the second case, the more positive assertion, that all cultures are of equal value, is being made.

The cultural-relativist agenda grew out of opposition to nineteenth-century evolutionary schema, which created out of the world's cultures a graded series, in

which those at the top had art, science and civilization and those at the bottom did not. This imposition of a particularly culture-bound definition of art, in association with a colonialist ideology, denied art to many cultures and, since art was one of the signs of civilization, devalued the things they produced. George Kubler (1991: 85) has written about the distaste for America in European thought and literature:

The distaste was and remains a negative esthetic expression about America and Americans during the Enlightenment, and it survives in Europe and elsewhere today.... [There was] a dominant belief in enlightened Europe, from 1750 to 1900, that America was inferior as to its natural and racial endowment. Buffon as a naturalist in 1750 deprecated the animal species as inferior and the humans in ancient America as 'impotent and savage'. Kant's verdict as philosopher in 1778—that Amerindians 'were incapable of any culture, still far behind the Negroes'—was followed by Hegel's 'immature and impotent continent'.

It is against this background that we should see the work of such early museum ethnographers as Mason and W. H. Holmes, and the even more fundamental contribution of Franz Boas. They were concerned to communicate the aesthetic features of Native American material culture through the development of collections and the organization of exhibitions, as well as through their writings. In doing so, they were involved in a process of asserting the value of Native American culture and way of life, making Native Americans visible again as people and showing them in a positive light.

The initial division between ethnographic museums, where Native American arts were shown, and art galleries, where art in the European tradition was exhibited, was in itself a continuing imposition of the Western concept of art. In one sense, the failure to divide the products of Native American cultures into art and non-art would have accorded with Yekuana classifications, but in another sense it represented the continued subordination of Native American artefacts to the evolutionary schema. This contradiction cannot easily be resolved. If only certain works are selected for inclusion within the art gallery, being chosen either on arbitrary aesthetic grounds or by analogy with Western categories of art objects—for example, objects with painted designs, then that continues the process of appropriation: the objects are reclassified without reference to indigenous values. It is here that exhibiting ethnographic objects as art becomes part of a radical critique of art galleries: it provides a challenge to narrowly constructed definitions of art and to the separation of art from artefact that was the product of a particular period of European history. And though it can be argued that this strategy also incorporates artefacts within global processes that are essentially part of a Western agenda, it has the advantage of doing so by making people reflect on other peoples' categories and other constructions of the world.

Other Peoples' Aesthetics

In discussing the exhibition of products of the Fourth World, of 'other cultures', as aesthetic objects, it is helpful to make an initial distinction between the aesthetics of the producing culture and the aesthetics of the exhibiting culture (though we shall see that the distinction is not an easy one to maintain). To begin with, I shall assume that the distinction is a strong one and accept the cultural-relativist position that different cultures have different and relatively autonomous aesthetic traditions. What is beautiful to members of one culture may not be to members of another, or, to phrase it more generally, the aesthetic sensibilities of one culture may differ radically from those of another. The same object may be seen, felt, or appreciated in different ways and on the basis of different attributes, to the extent that it may, arguably, become a different object. To take an apparently extreme and hypothetical example, in one case aesthetics might include how the object smelt and in the other focus on attributes of shape. If an object from the former culture were exhibited on the basis of its shape and surface form, then it would be treated in terms of the aesthetics of the exhibitor rather than of the producer. In the case of basketry, it is quite conceivable that matters such as the smell or the feel of the basket, as well as its appearance, should be part of its aesthetics for the producer. It is worth quoting at length Trudie Lamb Richmond (1989: 127-9), herself a Native American, writing about Schaghticoke basketry:

To understand and appreciate Native American basket-making fully, one must make the transition in thinking from materialism to spiritualism.... I spoke to a Mohawk basket-maker not long ago and asked her how she felt about weaving sweet grass into her baskets. Sweet grass is used by her people in their ceremonies and like tobacco is believed to have great power.... She told me she had thought about this meaning and that was why she always talked to the sweet grass and to her baskets as she made them. She said that she asked forgiveness for having to sell the baskets, but that she needed the money to survive. Using the sweet grass would keep the baskets strong and alive, and she hoped that the people who bought them would appreciate their significance. The basket weaver explained that she never picked the grass without making a tobacco offering.

The particular raw material used will usually have an impact on the visible form of the object, but this is not always going to be the case. Moreover, the aesthetic appreciation of that visible form may be enhanced by knowledge of the properties of the raw materials used and their cultural significance. It is sometimes difficult, even impossible, for museums to allow their public access to the full aesthetic potential of an object, since touching the object may transgress the requirements of conservation, and smell, like colour, fades with time. However, it should always be possible to draw the public's attention to the existence of such properties.

Aesthetic relativism thus applies to the non-visible properties of objects and to the intersection of form and cultural meaning. But it also applies to observable

form. When considering shape alone, there is no reason to suppose that the attributes of observable form that were appreciated by the maker, and are part of the object's intended form, are going necessarily to be the ones seized on by the consuming or exhibiting culture. Mason sets out what he considers to be the basis of the aesthetics of Native American basketry:

Unity in variety, the underlying principle in all esthetic composition, finds its first step illustrated in the making up of a basket.... This unity is of a very high order; for in many examples, coupled with a monotony of elements absolutely under control of the artist, there is at the same time a charming variation in width and length of parts in harmony with, and made necessary by, the widening and narrowing of the basket.... Usually the perfection of stitch is the aim of the worker. (1988: 142)

In the following paragraphs he provides a catalogue-type entry and a lyrical description of a Washoe basket that efficiently summarizes a whole range of attributes that go into the Western appreciation of a basketry form:

A rare coiled basket made by a Washoe woman named Datsolalee. It is in the collection of A. Cohn, Carson City, Nevada. The piece measures 8½ inches high, is 12 inches wide, and 6 inches wide at the opening. The stitches number more than fifty thousand, being thirty to the inch. The body colour is a rich light gold, and the figures are in red and black. It weighs 16 ounces, and is valued at many hundreds of dollars. The figures on the basket represent birds migrating or flying away, the motto being, 'When the birds leave their nests and fly away, we shall move.' The shape of this piece and the quality of the sentiment in the markings are excelled only by the inimitable quality of the work on the surface. It is difficult to conceive of a more perfectly uniform piece of handiwork than this. (ibid.: 142-3)

It is easy to see how this description comes out of his theoretical framework, related as it is to the technique-and-form school of Gottfried Semper. The weights and measures, the meticulous counting of stitches and the stress on uniformity, gain meaning through the idea that perfection arises out of the application of technique to functional form. There is nothing wrong with such a perspective, and it is one that has, in Mason's case, resulted in a magnificent examination of the relationship between technique and form that can provide the basis for much further research. However, the description tells us little about the aesthetics of Washoe baskets from the perspective of the Washoe producer. For example, although it hints that there may be a dimension of content that articulates with technique and form, it leaves that unexplored. While Washoe aesthetic processes and concepts may have much in common with Mason's interpretations of the

aesthetics of their baskets, we are not presented with any evidence that this is the case.⁴

A Cross-Cultural Definition of Aesthetics

As Coote (1989: 237) has argued, 'the explication of the differences between different cultures' ways of seeing should...be the primary task of the anthropology of aesthetics'. Although it may be perfectly legitimate to see other peoples' works through the eyes of one's own culture, the anthropologist's job is to reconnect aesthetics with the culture that produced the object. However, before going on to consider how such a reconnection can be achieved, and how it might be reflected in exhibiting the works of 'other cultures', I can no longer postpone the task of defining a little more precisely what I include under the rubric of aesthetics. I have discussed the issue of cross-cultural aesthetics in detail elsewhere (Morphy 1989, 1992b) and will only summarize the arguments here.

In the case of material culture, 'aesthetics' refers to the effects of properties of objects on the senses, to the qualitative dimension of the perception of objects. Such properties include physical ones, such as an object's form, surface qualities, feel and smell. They may also include non-material attributes of the object that are signified by it or associated with it, such as the attributes of age or distant place or magical substance. In relation to physical properties, these stand as connotation to denotation. Many of the physical properties are apprehended cross-culturally. Such attributes as weight, shininess, softness, perhaps even symmetry and balance, are analogous to electricity in that they can have an impact on the nervous system irrespective of the cultural background of the person experiencing them. The non-material attributes presuppose cultural knowledge.

The properties of the object are not in themselves aesthetic properties, any more than an electric shock is. They become aesthetic properties through their incorporation within systems of value and meaning that integrate them within cultural processes. Shininess and symmetry, as aesthetic properties, are interpreted or appreciated on the basis of certain evaluative criteria that, in simple terms, cause them to be viewed positively or negatively, either in themselves or in relation to other properties or combinations of properties. This value converts an abstract, or

4. There have been a few studies that have attempted to elicit the aesthetic criteria employed by Native American basketmakers, one of the most substantial being the comparatively early study by O'Neale (1932) of the Yurok-Karok of North California. Her study, however, was based on short-term fieldwork and fails to explore the indigenous categories or to consider the connotations of particular forms. Moreover, the questions of emotional effect and the language of aesthetic appreciation from an emic viewpoint are hardly considered. I am grateful to Ed Carter for drawing my attention to O'Neale's work.

almost physical, property into an aesthetic quality, and this quality cannot be assumed to be invariant across cultural boundaries. The aesthetic quality may in turn be linked to particular cultural meanings, and these too can vary cross-culturally. One of the classic examples of the incorporation of aesthetic properties of objects within an overall system of value is that of the Massim region of Papua New Guinea, where the property of heaviness is associated with land, agricultural production and femaleness, and lightness is associated with voyaging, exchange of goods and male careers (see Munn 1986: 80 ff.). Thus, aesthetics involves not simply how something looks and is appreciated, but also how it is felt and understood. This insight illustrates both the difficulties and the potentialities of communicating aesthetic values cross-culturally. Understanding the aesthetic response of a member of another culture to an object requires suspending one's own response to it, and learning how that object and its attributes are incorporated into systems of value and meaning. If one can teach people to interpret and value the properties of the objects of another culture according to the aesthetics of that culture, then one may provide a powerful insight into that world, and into what it feels like to be a member of it.

Guss's analysis of the cultural context of Yekuana basketry provides an excellent basis for the understanding of Yekuana aesthetics. The Yekuana employ a technique that is widespread throughout much of the Amazonian region, and many of the designs that are found on their basketry also occur throughout the region. Employing a perspective from Western aesthetics (that used by Mason, for example) would make it difficult to differentiate between the particular cases. Yet, despite the existence of common cultural themes that cross-cut the region, we know that the meaning of the particular elements, and the context of their occurrence and use, varies from place to place. Guss's particular focus is on the Yekuana *waja*, the circular serving-trays that are used for their staple food, cassava. It is impossible to summarize the full complexity of his analysis, so I will concentrate on only a few aspects of it.

In a revealing section (Guss 1989: 79-85), he shows how baskets mark stages in the first year of a marriage. A man is expected to make nearly the full complement of baskets that his household requires. The first basket that he weaves for his wife is a version of a plain basket called a *waja tingkuihato*. It is a finely woven basket made from cane. Although woven in a single colour, the mosaic of the weave produces a pattern of radiating lines referred to as *kutto shidiyu* (or 'frog's bottom'). It is from this basket that the couple eat during the first year of their marriage. At the end of the year, the husband weaves a *waja tometo* ('painted' basket), whose pattern is marked out by the use of alternating black and white plaits. By changing the sequences of plaiting, the technique can be used to produce an almost infinite variety of different designs. The particular design selected is chosen after consultation between the man and his father, and may well be one that was used by his father or grandfather for one of their wives. The use of the painted *waja* is a sign that the marriage is established: 'the special images

woven into this “painted” *waja* will be a clear statement of the strength and uniqueness of their bond’ (ibid.: 82).

In order to explain the opposition between the frog’s bottom baskets and the painted baskets, and the different contexts of their use, we must consider both the significance of the materials of which they are made and also the significance of the designs themselves. The plain basket is made from *ka’na*, a sacred cane that had its origins in ‘heaven’ and was one of the original materials brought down to earth (ibid.: 141). It is considered both a pure and a safe substance; it is also in some sense considered to be pre-cultural. Plain baskets, similar to the ‘frog’s bottom’, but less finely made, are used in the context of fasts and in other situations where people are particularly concerned with purity. The painted *waja* are made from two varieties of cane that are associated with powerful and dangerous spirit familiars that can be life-threatening, unless treated with care (ibid.: 127). People who are in a weak or spiritually dangerous condition, or who are responsible for someone in such a condition (for example, the father of a new baby), must avoid contact with the cane and eat from a plain basket. The designs themselves reflect this ambivalent status, since they represent subjects that are both potentially dangerous and of cultural value, sources of poisons for example, and such animals as the jaguar. For people who are in a spiritually strong condition, the painted baskets can be a positive force, purifying food by symbolically removing poisonous substances, marking the identity of the person and enabling the maker to reflect on myths and cultural processes. The use of the plain basket during the early part of a marriage can thus be seen both as precautionary, while a potentially dangerous relationship, in which childbirth and anger are never far away, is being established, and as a sign of the newness of the relationship and its potential (ibid.: 81). The painted basket, on the other hand, is a sign of the strength of a relationship that is well established and marks it with a particular identity. It links the marriage with the history of a family and of a culture.

Thus, for the Yekuana, the aesthetics of their basketry involves its integration within a cultural context in which the form of a basket and the contexts of its use together provide part of the framework of the Yekuana world. The value of the plain basket exists in relation to the value of the painted basket, and a Yekuana appreciation of its form will involve the understanding of its significance as an object of purity, a connotation that can be conveyed by its ‘material, technique, design, and function...coordinated to communicate the same message’ (ibid.: 146).

It might be argued that Guss’s fine analysis has produced the elucidation of the cultural value of Yekuana baskets, rather than an exposition of their aesthetics: the aesthetics, if anything, is the anthropologist’s aesthetics, as he or she delights at the way in which cultural meanings can be read into everyday material objects. My response to such an argument would be to both reject it and accept it. It may be rejected, in the sense that the cultural meanings are going to affect the way in which objects are perceived, and are going to be integral to the ways in which the forms of the objects have an impact on the senses. Aesthetic perceptions and conceptions are part of a cultural system. The aesthetic effects of objects are not

only part of value-creating processes, but are also affected in turn by the values given to them and the meanings of objects into which people are socialized. While the meanings of plain as opposed to painted *waja* are not in themselves aesthetic values, they are likely to influence the aesthetic perception of baskets of the respective types, and may be part of the way in which an aesthetic system is culturally structured through the consistent association of perceived form with emotional content. On a priori grounds, the aesthetics of a painted *waja* is going to be different for someone who associates it with potentially dangerous forces and substances, from what it is for someone who sees it only as a design form. The emphasis on cultural knowledge, on the cultural semiotics and connotations of the objects, is a necessary counter to those who see knowledge of meaning and context as almost an impediment to aesthetic appreciation.

However, although analysis of cultural meanings is a necessary component of an anthropological study of aesthetics, I should make clear that I do not intend to reduce aesthetics to cultural meaning or context. In order to analyse the aesthetic dimension of a particular object, it is necessary to go beyond sketching in the cultural background to an examination of the particular way in which the object is appreciated, perceived and evaluated by members of that culture, and to show how the creation of an aesthetic effect is explicitly or implicitly part of the intentional production of perceivable form. The task of the anthropologist is to elicit interpretations, take note of the data and observe the structurings of effects across media, thereby filling in the gap between cultural analysis and the objects as experienced by members of the culture.

Conclusion: Basketry, Aesthetics and Colonialism

Even with the information we now have, we do not know how the Yekuana 'see' their basketry, how they divide it up into components, how baskets fit into their perceptual world. As Forge (1970: 286) wrote, 'it is impossible literally to see through the eyes of another man, let alone perceive with his brain. Yet if we are to consider the place of art in any society...we must beware of assuming that they see what we see and vice versa.' An anthropology of perception, if such existed, might enable us to get closer, but to see as the Yekuana do would require that we were socialized into their world, and that we were used to the light and shade and the sounds and smells of the rain forest. The ethnography does, however, give us a greater understanding of what and how the baskets mean to the Yekuana, and provides a perspective on how to view them and how to value them. With this information we certainly do not see the baskets as we saw them before, and we may have shifted a little closer to the Yekuana view. We appreciate the baskets, as the Yekuana do, in terms of their form, texture, colour, and even smell; and knowledge of the way these aspects are culturally valued brings us closer to the

Yekuana aesthetic system and enables us to reflect on whether the form, texture, colour and smell are the same for them as they are for us.

In most cases, we do not have this quality of information concerning the cultural significance of objects. Moreover, exhibitions usually consist of objects from many different cultures, with only one or two examples from each place. This is partly because of the nature of the collections, partly because of strict criteria of aesthetic selection (the 'only the best examples will do' syndrome) and partly because there are many reasons, other than the aesthetics of a particular cultural tradition, that motivate the exhibitor. The exhibition may be designed to display regional variation, or the effect of different techniques on form, or the impact of European 'contact' on design. But rather than seeing such exhibitions as fundamentally wrong and misguided, we can draw more positive lessons from our discussion of Yekuana aesthetics.

We have learned that it is possible to gain insights into other peoples' aesthetic traditions. Using a variety of different sources of information—the objects themselves, written texts and labels, film, photography, dioramas—it would be possible to create a museum exhibition that was designed specifically to evoke and inform about the aesthetics of another culture. Indeed, it might be argued that in designing ethnographic exhibitions anthropologists should be able to help people see the objects in that light, and should always be aware of the dangers inherent in subordination to an alien aesthetic tradition. Once people are attuned to the idea that other aesthetics exist—that there are ways of understanding a set of objects that are separate from the canons of our own taste and outside the historical tradition of our own art—then a lesson has been learned that can be applied even in cases where the viewer is ignorant or where information is lacking. The aesthetic contemplation of the objects of other cultures in the light of knowledge of cultural difference encourages people to reflect on the meanings that may be there, and on their cultural value, and encourages them to look beyond surface form. Focus on the aesthetic dimension could provide a source of information about other cultures, just as much as any so-called objective abstraction from the object, such as its function, can.

Such is the complex nature of human cultures that any way of exhibiting objects involves selection and simplification. Seeing objects as functional types, or regional types, or frozen in some pastiche of their cultural context in the form of a diorama, can be as misleading as displaying them on pedestals as 'art', and is just as likely to confirm cultural stereotypes. Exhibiting as 'art' does have benefits. If the historical context is right, then the assertion of the value of the objects as art can play a part in the process that results in the acknowledgement of the equal humanity and cultural achievement of the producers, which can have consequences for the recognition of their rights. It can even have economic consequences: products that are no longer used to store grain can be produced for sale in the market, resulting in a form of economic integration that, paradoxically, can help to maintain and perpetuate cultural differences through a process of cultural transformation.

The manufacture of objects for sale inevitably results in an interchange of value and in the migration of aesthetic concepts. However, this neither lessens the authenticity of the objects nor makes them into alien products, but merely adds another screen through which to view the complex, emergent image of cross-cultural aesthetics. Aesthetic systems have never really been neatly packaged into discrete boxes labelled with the names of individual cultures. Although, as a symbolic system, Yekuana baskets seem to fit together in a neat package, they have always been traded with neighbouring groups, who shared many of the same designs and symbolic themes and defined themselves in relation to those themes. Coherence is created through flux.

Native American basketry exists as part of a regional network of trade and exchange in which styles change over time and in which aesthetic appreciation of neighbouring styles must always have been a factor. Trade with Europeans added another dimension to basketmaking, albeit one that for most of its duration has been linked indissolubly with the colonial process and has had the strands of domination, expropriation and exploitation woven into its being. But together with these are other strands of more positive origin, consisting of the aspiration of the weaver, the struggle to survive, to engage the other and to define the self. The overall mosaic, as Handsman (1987) suggests, was a fusion of colonial process and indigenous struggle. The woven and traded baskets became instruments of survival, which in more positive times could become objects of reflection and a basis for the continued assertion of cultural identity. Reflecting on the aesthetics of Native American basketry means reflecting on the aesthetics of particular cultures, and on the interchange of aesthetics and values between Native Americans and Europeans. But it also means reflecting on the fear, hostility, appropriation, dispossession and alienation that lies in between.

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REVIEW ARTICLE

**ETHNOGRAPHY AND GENERAL THEORY
OR PEOPLE VERSUS HUMANKIND**

PAUL DRESCH

RICHARD FARDON (ed.), *Localizing Strategies: Regional Traditions of Ethnographic Writing*, Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press / Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press 1990. x, 357 pp., Index. £17.50.

AT the 1986 American Anthropological Association meetings in Philadelphia, Arjun Appadurai convened a panel called 'Place and Voice'. The aim was to discuss relations between regional ethnography and 'metropolitan' theory.¹ Two months or so later, having planned the event two years before, Richard Fardon convened a conference at St. Andrews 'to examine the dialectic between regional and theoretical factors in the development of monograph writing' (p. ix). The tendencies in anthropology that gave both conveners pause for thought still flourish like the green bay tree, and the Fardon volume provokes reflection.²

1. For the resulting papers, see *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. III, no. 1, 1988. Unfortunately, Friedrich chose not to include his admirable piece to which I refer below. The use of 'metropolitan' to describe sociological theory in such contexts as the present one is Appadurai's.

2. The contributors to the volume and their subjects are: McKnight on Australia, Riches on Eskimology, James on Sudan and Ethiopia, Tonkin on West Africa, Werbner on South-Central Africa (a very welcome reprint), Parkin on East Africa, Strathern on Melanesia, Gilsenan on the (western) Middle East, Street on the (eastern) Middle East, Burghart on India, Kapferer on Sri Lanka, Hobart on Bali, and Moeran on Japan.

Reading Skills

The shadow of the 'writing culture' movement hangs over most of the papers here. Fardon's introduction provides a good critical summary of the issues, and he rightly distinguishes James Clifford from the epigones. Still, a mention of Hayden White would help: Clifford, after all, tries to do for anthropology what White did for history some years ago—and one of the attractive things about White's work (see White 1978, 1987) was the way 'the burden of history' never quite disappeared into textuality. Clifford, for his part, despite his skill, ends up with a gap between humanism and determinism, which 'textuality' covers unconvincingly: 'It is as if Clifford covertly recognizes two historical periods: a period of Anglo-French imperialism marked by political inequalities, and another of American ascendancy during which politics have become textually internalized' (Fardon, p. 12). We are now in the latter. The supposed links, or lack of them, between texts and politics dominate the literature, while style establishes authors' claims to be thought politically correct. But as Rabinow notes (cited by Fardon, p. 16), no one's credentials are stamped by denouncing a dead colonialism. We are constantly faced with inauthenticities that have long been a joke in literary criticism—the 'dangers of the text', for instance, which really amount to the risk of paper-cuts.

How much this has to do with the practice of anthropology is doubtful. This is not (*pace* Fardon) because style and content are separable, but because few issues are entirely new. Moeran's discussion of his own work, for instance, explains how dropping the dates from his material freed him to write more tellingly: 'I found I was able to collapse time, to take totally separate entries from my written journals and place them together thematically' (p. 349). Those snared in current muddles over fact and fiction might think this either 'literary' or dishonest. But all ethnographers do something like this. The last explicit go around the subject simply happened to run the other way: the Manchester school's 'extended case method' was aimed precisely at the practice of 'apt illustration' (see e.g. Gluckman 1967: xiii-xiv), and the failure of their attempts to analyse 'total process' was exemplary. Descriptions are always partial. Many problems have occurred before in less exotic language than that of modern textualism, and one fears anthropologists less well read than Moeran have discovered they were speaking prose all these years. Indeed, the wide acceptance of 'ethnographies as texts' as, in effect, a new paradigm tends to rob one of means to read anthropology.³

3. 'The essays [in *Writing Culture*] do not claim ethnography is only "literature"' (Clifford and Marcus 1986: 26). One of the unintended consequences of the movement, however, was that many students concluded that all ethnographies were 'fictions' and thus much of a muchness, which was not the point. To recover the value of the movement one almost has to go back to where it started (e.g. Marcus and Cushman 1982). But it seems fair to say that the 'writings on writing' with the greatest audience have been precisely those that show little sense of context.

A properly reflexive anthropology would be one aware of its own history, and thus alert to where its concepts come from—able, among other things, to think what in fact has changed when problems seem to reappear. But much recent ‘theory’ (I shall justify those quotation marks as I go along) seems directed at an audience that reads very little and for whom anthropology’s past disappears into mist ten years ago. Nothing could be more at odds with the subject’s practice. Where psychology and sociology do indeed work mainly with new publications, anthropologists use even old journals, let alone old books, almost as much as recent ones (MacLeod 1985; see also Beattie 1971). An illusion of unilinear progress requires sorting grain from chaff: ‘theories may be discarded as erroneous but ethnography always has some redeemable value and may be subjected endlessly to reanalysis’ (Fardon, p. 4), for instance; so Malinowski the field-worker seems contemporary and Malinowski the theoretician an exotic fossil. It depends how one sets about this, and of course what one means by ‘theory’. Models? Methods? The kind of claims Malinowski made about a ‘school’ of anthropology? Whichever of these, theory is as open as ethnography to reanalysis, and ethnography as much engrossed as theory with practicalities of time and place.⁴ But genealogies that mark only anthropologists no longer seem satisfactory.

Herzfeld’s *Anthropology Through the Looking Glass* (1987; thus after the Fardon conference) does an excellent job of locating such issues in Mediterranean anthropology. Not only is ‘theory’, in the sense here of a set of interests (an agenda for research, perhaps), linked persuasively to what was written at different times, but academic and local interests are shown to be entangled also, encompassed by claims that centre upon ‘Europe’. To show this requires reference to the myths of classical Greece and to constant reworkings of that imagery since the early nineteenth century. Again, the changing agenda of research in India makes sense within a larger history (see particularly Cohn 1968), which in this case can be traced back at least to Hegel (Appadurai 1988b).

Several papers in the Fardon volume remind one how far back current interests reach, though the spread of such interests has itself been recent. Kapferer, for instance, starts convincingly with Robert Knox on Ceylon, in the seventeenth century, to show the effects of emphasis on one region within Sri Lanka (pp. 280 ff.)—not an obvious move to make twenty years ago. One is also reminded that the subject lacks natural boundaries. Anything may be pressed to use in making sense of what we read and find. The breadth of possible references, as well as the subject’s indeterminate depth historically, requires that anthropology, more than most things, be always read symptomatically: this establishes, on the one hand, the

4. It should also be said that time and place determine ‘theory’s’ value. Leach’s ‘Rethinking Anthropology’ (1961), for instance, takes its value from the assumptions against which he wrote and which until then seemed natural to many. Malinowski’s ‘The Group and the Individual in Functional Analysis’ (1939) by contrast, was not so much simply bad as surplus: it answered no ethnographic need.

significance of the pieces read and, on the other, the reader's own position. The products are highly various, and ways of reading define one's colleagues more clearly than do ways of writing.

Anthropology exists less in paradigms, or even departments now, than in what people read and how. But as the breadth of possible reference widens (more journals, more books, more conferences), so disagreements on how one selects from this become more pressing. The problems are all too obvious (common sense looks to others like coded language), but no obvious remedy is in sight, for if one passively accepts the current 'theory' (language coded elsewhere) then ethnography itself becomes clumsy if not redundant. *Localizing Strategies* and its kin suggest at least a shift of interest. Let us argue over what in fact we do instead of over what we claim. Fardon's volume offers the superficial paradox of a book on separate area-traditions addressing a fairly general audience without a discrete topic (no 'kinship' here, nor 'politics'; sub-title aside, it is not about 'writing'), in which perspective the unity of anthropology looks rather different and slightly odd. Though the mechanism receives no close attention, a good many people turn out to know butter from margarine. Not paradigms, but skills and problems are what we share—and an interest, of course, in how problems differ from place to place.

Language still nags, for instance. Gilsenan (p. 228) is politely diffident about the diffidence shown ethnographers of the Arab world who had studied Arabic. But societies with apparently quite different concepts of causality and the like ('classic' societies, one could have said some years ago) were too often those for whose languages we lacked a dictionary. Ignorance was bliss indeed:

The result has been that the anthropology of complex non-Western societies has, till recently, been a second class citizen in anthropological discourse. This...involves a kind of reverse Orientalism, whereby complexity, literacy, historical depth and structural messiness operate as disqualifications in the struggle of places for a voice in metropolitan theory. (Appadurai 1986: 357)

It is questionable whether that struggle matters much, and Indian ethnography was in any case (so the rest of us thought) what broke the jinx. Still, the primitive world, whether fact or fiction, is nowadays hard to come by: 'as the societies under consideration become more complex, literate and historical, the kind of decontextualization that facilitates generalization becomes harder to accomplish' (ibid.: 359). Our 'localizing strategies' seem not to keep up with this, and language remains the index: 'it is impossible, given the usual period of fieldwork of 12-18 months, for a fieldworker to learn them all [i.e. all the different tongues used in an Aborigine settlement]. Hence fieldworkers normally concentrate on one language' (McKnight, p. 57). Even that should give pause for thought. Admittedly language-learning in outback Australia or highland New Guinea must be intensive. But Arabic in a year? Mandarin Chinese? Tamil? What is the difference? This

particular nettle no one grasps, though it flowers where Appadurai points to problems.⁵

Assuming that ethnographers of different regions are roughly comparable, those studying the Arab world (or China or India) have to wonder of New Guinea (or Australia or the Amazon Basin) how much ethnographic error is lost in regional and dialect difference—we certainly misprise things easily in fieldwork, so do our colleagues in the bush somehow not? Those studying New Guinea have to wonder for their part (and so they should) what ethnographers of the Arab world (or China, or India) lose by consulting dictionaries when in doubt, which in practice happens often and notoriously flattens regional differences. In both cases, presumably, the anthropologist's practice aligns with local assumptions about hierarchy and comparability—in short, with local definitions that largely construct for us our objects of analysis. One can imagine a Fardonesque volume on the subject.

Such problems, however, and our awareness of them, are exactly what characterize anthropology. Lexical concerns are one space of several (the most obvious, perhaps; certainly the most discussed) that open towards over-interpretation or, more barbarously, 'over-trope'. Part of anthropology is spotting how one slips into this. When we do slip, we collapse the ethnographic process and present ourselves with an aspect of what we started with. Regardless of whether one knows a region in detail, one can often enough spot the chance of such slippage; and concern for this turns out to be common to people who work in areas that are otherwise very different. Anthropology, like history, consists of disparate practices tied together, when at all, by what Friedrich (see note 1 above) calls 'craftsmanship'. This remains so within a changing world that makes studying the erstwhile 'primitives' more like studying the erstwhile 'orient', or indeed more like studying Europe.

One of the nice things about the Fardon volume is that several contributors have the honesty to invoke their craftly standards, 'standards...by which [for instance] we should judge at least parts of this text [on the 'Nipnip' Nuer] as rubbish' (James, p. 125). We work by such standards constantly. It is foolish to pretend, when 'theory' gets loose (here with the sense of an unsecured claim to precedence), that we have none, for this only mislocates our problems. 'Writing', for one, was no panacea. Many of those writing about writing on culture write not very cultured prose: indeed, some seem incapable of a lucid sentence. Geertz, to take the opposite case, is scarcely lost for a crafted phrase or two (he is sometimes in the Ronald Firbank class), but too often he dazzles where a steady light is needed. Impatience with his work stems from other causes, which Hobart touches on here and has touched on elsewhere (1986: 146) in terms that, were ethnography

5. McKnight himself is very clear that language-learning is an index of the problem, not the problem itself. Rather, it falls within a general pattern of Australian studies where everything seems to happen 'just too late' (p. 51).

the only issue, would be simply damning.⁶ The terms are much like those suggested earlier, of collapsing the ethnographic process, presenting oneself with a mirrored image. Yet here is another sense of 'theory'—not a set of interests, but a summary example that claims a wider than usual audience and inserts anthropology's terms in common discourse (cf. Fardon, p. 24; Marcus and Cushman 1982: 51-3).

'Theory', then, has several senses. As a humble referent the term is useless, though its persuasive power can be quite strong. Recent interest in politics (at least, political language) and historicity (thus far, primarily, that of our own subject) seems in fact to turn around a more careful, less dramatic, practice of producing sense without over-interpretation, and language is the obvious case. As the subject becomes more popular we also have a problem of audience. On the one hand, those we rely on to get the point start to seem like cliques. On the other, an enormous readership is willing to consume if not ethnography, then certainly anthropology. We should not be surprised if generalities become the currency of rank and precedence, and 'theory' as it were the colour of the money.

Theory as Something New

Geertz's role as the Margaret Mead of his generation was an extreme case of a common phenomenon, one that requires we remember anthropology's place in the larger world of such things as literary weeklies. Certain modes of writing, it seems, key into our readers' wishes (the image of individual actors elaborating meaning has been with us for years now), and they provide, to put the matter bluntly, means to fame and to self-advancement. The point has been made repeatedly, but more of the literature should have been cited in Fardon's volume. As it is, disagreement with 'star figures' comes off too smugly as wicked America versus righteous Britain (or righteous Europe, to make the numbers up), whereas, in fact, the bulk of criticism has been from American-based or American-trained authors:⁷ it is there more than here that one has to deal with 'a climate of competition which favours overbidding' (Dumont's diplomatic phrase). Yet the

6. The defensive phrase 'Geertz envy' has come into use on certain American circuits as if criticism were in bad taste. This will not do. If the emperor's clothes are threadbare, he should simply not strut about like this.

7. Which having been said, the distinction between American and non-American authors is better dropped in a list of things to read on these subjects: e.g. Rabinow 1985, 1986; Keesing 1987; Sangren 1988; Spencer 1989. Sangren is particularly interesting and, to judge from several angry responses, struck a nerve. In their reply to him, 'Michael M. J. Fischer and George E. Marcus, with Stephen A. Tyler' (1988) (why are they listed like a TV production team?) go so far as to muddle together ethnography, post-modernism and the first atom bomb.

structure of publishing, if nothing else, ties us all to the same problems. The general and the new become elided as part of marketing, again with slightly odd results.⁸

Fardon contends that the appearance of 'paradigm shifts' and 'crises' is often contrived (p. 4), and he says of Marcus and Fischer (p. 16)—to take only one example—that 'by chapters 5 and 6 of their book, the new in "new writing" has become synonymous with little more than recent'. Even this is not quite the point. Agreed that in academia ('small world', indeed) we are all meant to know what's now and wow,⁹ yet arriving in 1984 in an American department where 'the cutting edge' was sought for self-advancement, and up-to-dateness therefore highly prized, one found that the now and the wow at issue were the same now and wow of ten years earlier: Foucault, Derrida and the usual gang, with the solitary addition of Mikhail Bakhtin.¹⁰ The rediscovered ethnographers of Marcus and Clifford's world have an odd familiarity also: Bateson and Leenhardt, for instance, were long ago features of Rodney Needham's reading lists, which one presumes was a matter not of trendiness but again of telling butter from margarine. There comes a point where you cannot tell if reading Bateson, say, was terribly advanced or backward.

The notion of discrete 'theoretical time' is *prima facie* implausible (note how strong a move in the theory wars it remains to exhume dead ancestors, never mind the odd fixity of those now and wow reading lists) and it scarcely reflects how the subject works. Area ethnographies are, at least, out of phase. If Gilsenan (p. 231) can bemoan the long dominance of 'village studies' in the Middle East, and Parkin can seek an escape from similar problems through de Heusch's claim to something like a 'great tradition' in Africa (p. 185), then McKnight can still regret, at the same conference, the Aboriginalists' taste for books that consider more than one group at once—'a convention [sadly, it seems]...at variance with the norm of the intensive monograph elsewhere' (p. 53). Quarrels over who is the more advanced can be left to the less well read and the more ambitious. Different regions have their own problems. The terms mean different things in each. But an interesting by-product of *Localizing Strategies* and its kin is that linear histories of 'metropolitan theory' itself lose their attraction as all but a source of rough labels. If the mid-1950s were 'the high point of structural-functional accounts', and thus an apt

8. Inflation of this kind is nothing new with novels. Memoirs of forty years ago, perhaps even ninety years ago, complain of every third work being hailed as a work of genius. Nor is playing for a general audience new to anthropology (Malinowski's *Sex and Repression* is a famous case). But the elision of the general with the new is striking. See the publishers' advertisements and (sadly) the reviews in most current journals of anthropology.

9. This valuable phrase I owe to Michael Fahy, who in turn attributes it to the noted Bronx nationalist Rick Bucci.

10. One suspects that not even a list of approved authors is quite the crux of the matter. There are those who came to Bakhtin through 'theory', those who heard of him through Dostoevsky (more often, to be exact, through V. S. Pritchett), and those innocents who have still not heard of him. For people in the first category, the other two categories could as well be one.

time for Laura Bohannon to publish reminiscence in novel form (p. 7), they were also the high point of many anti-structural-functionalist efforts whose kinship to their opponent was less apparent then than now. In short, we no longer use existing literature to keep time (to decide who is nearest the 'cutting edge', for instance) but to establish who and where we are in a world rather larger than anthropology.

We should not pretend as part of this that new ideas are all old ones (nor is nostalgia an honest option). Current interests in textual metaphors, in poetics, in literary criticism are all genuine additions to anthropology, just as has been people's reading Foucault (rather less so Derrida) and taking note of political economy. Interests in different historicities and in forms of action are new. The major objection to the interests Clifford promotes could only be that the readings are still not 'close' enough. The problem arises when such interests serve as claims to authority, for anthropology, whatever else it is, is not a positive science.

The sciences themselves no longer look as they did. That too is part of what has changed—or should have done. Foucault and Derrida remain intensely fashionable (intensely misread also), but the same milieu that produced them produced also the rediscovery of Gaston Bachelard, whose writing on the history of science approved an 'anabaptist' philosophy: science in practice produced its own concepts, regardless of how philosophers said the world worked, and philosophy could not do more than aid their emergence and tidy up the world of ideas afterwards. The theme was taken up in Marxism, where the moral was drawn that theory's claims to govern practice were extremely suspect.¹¹ To understand the world required, however, theoretical effort (the sense here was of not leaving analytical terms 'unthought')—a Feyerbandian free-for-all left ideology intact. Nor did it locate the author in a world where subjects of their nature are decentred—which was surely the single point to grasp if post-structuralism (much talked of in the years since then) is not to be pre-structuralism simply new and improved with added Frenchmen. The author's position *vis-à-vis* readers and those written about is at issue, not a choice between tropology and objectivity. The joke has been that general 'theory' acquired such prominence in a world that (for 'theoretical' reasons, if you like) no longer has a legitimate place for it—and has not had for some time.

Whatever the sources, anthropology has internalized much that once looked like separable theory (here with the 'meta-narrative' sense; the commentary that legitimates what one does next). Works carry with them, in a way they did less before, a care for intellectual context. The range of reference, not least historical, that now routinely colours books and papers is an index of what has happened. Paradigms have given way to what looks like a 'sense of the past':

11. See Jenkins 1974, 1975. For a map of the French academic field at the time, see Lemert 1981. For an excellent introduction to what the issues were (and perhaps still are), see Soper 1986.

Without the sense of the past we might be more certain, less weighted down and apprehensive. We might also be less generous, and certainly we would be less aware. In any case, we have the sense of the past and we must live with it, and by it.

And we must read our literature by it... (Trilling 1951: 185)

By comparison, talk of general theory and of breaks with what came before has often come to look trivial. Marcus and Fischer's *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* (widely read and cited if any book has been in the last five years) was full of this: 'The essential tension fueling this kind of experimentation resides in the fact that experience has always been more complex than the representation of it that is permitted by traditional techniques of description and analysis in social-scientific writing' (Marcus and Fischer 1986: 43). The implication that 'non-traditional' techniques might not be less complex than experience betrays either dull experience or a strange conceit about one's place in a story as yet unwritten. The claim to be new has itself come to look old-fashioned.

In practice, the last several years have seen a 'growing tendency to produce careful, ethnographically based regional collections' (Appadurai 1986: 361), and the interest seems again to lie more with monographs than with pithy articles. This will not last for ever. Obstructions will build up more or less unnoticed, and we can all be surprised when shown what in fact they were; there lies another sense of 'theory', that of Wittgenstein's letting the fly from the bottle,¹² a sense compatible with 'anabaptist' interests. For the moment, however, the texture of ethnography seems in general rich. Major works routinely concentrate on unpacking the representations of at least local 'great traditions' (e.g. Fuller 1984), very often of missionary work (e.g. Fernandez 1982, James 1988), of colonial powers (e.g. Dirks 1987) and of nation-states (e.g. Davis 1987): even studies in particular villages show a keen appreciation of time and place (e.g. Boddy 1989; a particularly distinguished case). In what passed for 'theory' at the same period, all this was lost in an encounter between us (whoever 'we' might be) and the Other.¹³ The more conspicuous works of recent years thus already seem thin and to have formed a too-coherent knot.

The effect of claims to theoretical authority was to generalize anthropology's object, which ceased to be people and became instead 'humankind'. (Inclusive language made that much difference; it used to be called 'man'.) This bland confection, much the same in its essentials anywhere, could be analysed or interpreted, without reference to the past, by an equally unlocatable anthropologist.

12. Will that seem an in-group reference? Not so long ago it was common currency. The idea is simply that 'philosophical problems' arise from faulty questions—which may not be true of much philosophy but is certainly true of most ethnography.

13. Only recently did one realize who the Other is, that vast featureless being, well-intentioned and yet threatening, who haunts much current theory-writing: it is Mr Stay-Puft, the marsh-mallow man, in *Ghostbusters*.

The fantasy took many forms: not only 'the interpretive turn' itself, but ethnography as personal experience (e.g. Briggs 1970); the quest for 'woman' (e.g. Shostak 1981); the habit of taking 'texts' as the form of life; and, not least of course, the original 'reflexivity' (e.g. Dwyer 1982), which portrayed ethnography as two people in the void with a tape-recorder. All of this, as Hobart says (p. 311), presumed 'an antic theory of individual and society'.¹⁴ But it also invites, as if all proper selves were similar, a warm glow of fellow-feeling in readers' participation, and one rather thought someone (Hobart perhaps?) might quote, from *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Kundera on kitsch: 'Kitsch causes two tears to fall in quick succession. The first tear says: How nice to see children running on the grass! The second tear says: How nice to be moved, together with all mankind, by children running on the grass!' It is the second tear that makes kitsch kitsch.

Anthropology's Position

The point of anthropology is judicious assessment of the sense people's worlds and actions make, and to make them the same so thoughtlessly is to deprive each one of us of moral autonomy. Space must be left for the people studied. This is not a matter of 'polyphony' (let us use what tricks we may, by all means) but of keeping clear that accounts are partial and that the author's position is not that of the people written about—which is surely where Bakhtin might have been of use. Unfortunately, the principle by which groups of 'humankind' were separated out (at least in some traditions) underwent a surreptitious change that confused things further, and further collapsed the relation between readers, writers and people written about. 'Culture' had been a handy, undefined term with vague associations of the 'superorganic': an attribute of groups, perhaps, and harmless enough when these groups were all neatly separate. Now they were not, it became the stuff that binds groups together and increasingly an attribute of individuals. The wider world took over anthropology's term of too casual art. Certain parts of the subject (the process, one fears, has hardly started) became managers of this mystic substance, transmitting it back and forth in terms not mediated by history, class or structure of any kind.¹⁵ One can only be thankful that ethnography kept dropping

14. Hobart has a sharp nose for cant. But, particularly having quoted Butler ('For learned nonsense has a deeper sound...'), he should know to avoid words like 'amaurotic' (p. 312), 'allelomorphic' (ibid.) and 'autolatrous' (p. 330). Cynics will turn to his next paper expecting lots of difficult words that begin with B.

15. One hesitates to cite cases for fear of the point seeming just *ad hominem*. Yet the literature has been littered recently with ethnographers writing primarily of themselves as a 'type' of person.

what terms were not of use to it and left space for the people studied in the gaps of its reworking. The dispersal of ethnographic practice proved valuable. If anthropology now seems 'all margins anyhow' (Gilsenan, p. 238), well, most of it usually has been. Yet our own autonomy, with the resulting lack of certainty that we are ever right, seems always to worry people.

One of the odder features of the Fardon volume, and of others like it, is, therefore, that everyone feels left out, or nearly everyone. Eskimology has 'a lowly place in the anthropological collective conscious' (p. 71); 'Africanists...at the conference owned to a common sense of marginality' (p. 94); bookshops used to file Middle East ethnography under area, not under anthropology (p. 228; they still do, of course); 'the reputation of South Asianists in Social Anthropology is not a very good one' (p. 260). Admittedly, the first essay starts on a more confident note—'It is hard to imagine anthropology without Australian Aborigines...'; but even Aboriginalists, it turns out, suffered 'isolation, and the concomitant feeling of being out of the main academic stream...' (p. 62). So much so that many went to work elsewhere, presumably in search of real anthropology. Everything turns on an absent centre. So, is there a ghost haunting anthropology, or is this a case of mild hysteria? We should know, having read our Todorov, not to ask.

The important thing is how the illusion works. Ethnographic fields are 'pre-constituted' by regionally specific histories—colonialism, trade, missionaries, whatever it may be (Fardon, p. 24). Other subjects form part of the field—so sometimes historians get there first and anthropologists try to carve a niche for themselves (Europe would be the extreme case), sometime historians arrive later and anthropologists are on the defensive (West Africa; Tonkin, p. 144); sometimes imaginative literature pre-defines an area, sometimes only ethnography allows such literature to flourish (Ethiopia and Sudan; James, p. 96). But there are privileged spots where anthropologists talk to hardly anyone. If the *anthropology* of the Middle East loses its stress in an endeavour shared with historians and economists (Gilsenan, p. 238), and the anthropologists of India are engaged with textualists (Burghart, p. 270), then those studying New Guinea, say, talk to no one but other anthropologists—'real' anthropology seems defined by the lack of anyone else's interest. The absent centre lies inland of Port Moresby. Add to this that other subjects, once away from area-specific detail, then come to us in search of 'theory' (the legacy of Lévi-Strauss's fame?) and one has the recipe for endless self-doubt, not to mention *nostalgie de brousse*. If ethnography is indeed the 'anabaptist' part of things, however, then the doubts of those who feel peripheral are misplaced. Anthropology as such is not worth the worry (again, see Beattie 1971), though as a space in which to work and a source of ideas it deserves protecting.

Fittingly, one of the more confident pieces in *Localizing Strategies* is Marilyn Strathern's on Melanesia. Much anthropology, she argues, has worked by inversion. But one has to expose the inversion's base, as with contrasting gift economies and commodity systems where 'what has to be cancelled is the apparent basis of comparison, which here would be the idea of "economy"' (p. 211)—which

in turn, one has to say, is what we did in our student essays and what students generally still do. Agreed that single contrasts are inadequate,

Perhaps a staged encounter could be set up between alien conversers—Trobriand and Maori, for example. For the anthropologist, unable to represent the one completely in terms of the other, would use his or her Western concepts to mediate between the two in such a way as to give the analytical language the status of a visible third voice. (Strathern, p. 212)

'Audible' would be more to the point with voices, third or otherwise, but the general idea is excellent—and, one has to say, well within that set of ideas made common by structuralism decades back. One moment of anthropologists' thought does seem like a kaleidoscope, where the distance is the same from all patterns to the watcher's eye (Dresch 1988). Probably this is indispensable.

Yet presenting anthropology to the wider world (keep an eye on that changing audience) reveals a structure of conceptual distance much like that Edmund Leach concocted for animals, sex and naughty words. Ethnographies as wholes are not equivalent. Amazonian Indians or New Guinea Highlanders, and even the Nuer if one leaves out their recent history, all seem 'other' enough to be unworrying: if they do strange things, it is part of their 'culture'; or as 'people without history' they form part of our own great tale, subjects (or objects) of colonial wickedness. The Indian caste system, by contrast, is an outrage to the liberal mind (Dumont was right enough there) and altogether too close to home, if only through its sheer longevity. The Islamic world is worse still, falling right on the boundary between home and the wild: the literate public find it hard to see the Middle East as people doing something other than we do; they see it all too easily as people doing what we do but apparently with perverse incompetence—hence some real taboos on the area's study and a popular sense of something akin to panic. Europe is, in some respects, more difficult still. Japan presents problems. 'Within particular nations,' says Rosaldo (1988: 79), 'those who most nearly resemble "ourselves" appear to be "people without culture"....' This illusion in fact is widespread and distributed untidily over national boundaries. False resemblance is as much a problem as exoticism ever was. If one subscribes to the idea of 'culture' in this sense (not everyone does, of course), then Rosaldo is right that some places have far too much of it and others have far too little. The degree to which, for political and intellectual reasons, an area needs constructing (or for that matter, deconstructing) varies hugely from case to case: only then does the kaleidoscope process work.

There are vast imbalances of power at issue also, but power's convolutions are less simple than some would have them. The image of an 'ethnographic gaze' dominating 'the Other' in a vast panopticon obscures the way that, for instance, Ethiopia's own 'imperial gaze' presents an unwary world with 'simple beings of nature who populate the fringes of empire' (James, p. 99). A certain edge is given to James's essay by the fact these are 'her' people being fantasized over—and, as it happens, displaced or murdered. Not everywhere is so grim. Yet the real position of those we study is often lost to the view of what passes as the academic

centre: flattening people into 'otherness' is indeed 'empowering them only to exist in terms of their author's sense of self' (Hobart, p. 311). Anthropologists are not so powerful as to make that interesting. Yet precisely at the time when the complexity of our position has been made obvious and the question of distance made problematic, anthropology has seen a move to replace the analysis of power with what can only be called mock-politics.

Access to a system still dominated by America and by spoken English offers vast rewards. We control rather little of this, though we operate with reference to quite a lot of it, and we should thus be careful in what way we generalize or elect not to. The mere fact of fieldwork is educational: 'In an absolute monarchy, or in a modern totalitarian state, investigative methods are rarely open to the...ethnographer who is not actually working for the state' (James, p. 131). But all states have acquired what were once totalitarian features (nowhere can one travel without a passport). We are all bound up in collusions that centre on the bombast of nation-states and on the flow of money. If there is one conspicuous case of 'localization' (Fardon) or 'the problem of place' (Appadurai), it must surely be that of states in a world economy, which, oddly, is little discussed here.

The space of the world filled up alarmingly as evolutionism and diffusionism tried to make of that world a coherent story; and, as Lenin argued memorably enough, the space was divided by colonial powers before ever they found for it local uses. Many of anthropology's 'areas' date from then. The affinity of functionalism with the later colonial setting, or of culture-history with America of the period, needs no rehearsing; nor yet does the invention of local units such as African 'tribes'. The transformation of imperial districts into nations that had seemingly always been there has been well analysed (e.g. Anderson 1983), as too might be the dispersal of such identities, each comparable to the others, in what became after the Second World War a world economy: not structuralism itself, but its nostalgia for 'the primitive' found a place in this, at the end of a process that had started with the primitives being found. (Lévi-Strauss's fascination with Rousseau was hardly whimsical.) But control of space locates labour in particular places (Harvey 1989). The homogeneity some predicted has not occurred, at least not in the form expected. The latest episode of time-space compression (Harvey's phrase) has been spectacular, and several markets approximate the instantaneous pan-global money market; but the crisis of representation provoked has been accompanied also by the prominence of identities less attached to place, or attached less obviously; those separate 'cultures' have in some cases now collapsed inward to the point where, in popular usage, not a state but an individual can claim to be 'multi-cultural'. No wonder, perhaps, that writing, for a while, seemed easier to deal with than culture, and that 'writing culture' re-established a feeling of control and distance.

Parts, though only parts, of the social field now approximate to homogeneous space of the kind in which geographers' models work. Difference is then produced, not found, in a manner reminiscent of Lévi-Strauss's world, where elements are recombined 'not so much...in a spirit of imitation but rather to allow

small but numerous communities to express their different originalities...' (Lévi-Strauss, 1969: 8). Across much of the world the same mythic representations are common property, and *bricolage* seems a matter less of creative tinkering than of differences in something like audience response. At that point, and only then, does it seem to us odd that 'culture' is conceived as something local and that 'at least since the latter part of the nineteenth century, anthropological theory has always been based on going *somewhere*, preferably somewhere geographically, morally and socially distant from the theoretical and cultural metropolis of the anthropologist' (Appadurai 1986: 356-7; original emphasis). Appadurai's own response has been a journal called *Public Culture*,¹⁶ concentrating on precisely those 'trans-national' facts and images that are hard to locate spatially, though 'decontextualization' (Appadurai, 1986: 359) remains a problem few contributors have faced satisfactorily.

These are subjects on which Appadurai is suggestive but where *Localizing Strategies* rather fails to fulfil its title's promise. What are these localizing strategies (if 'strategy' is the right word)? How are 'areas' established, and why have they appeared so real? Why, also, most importantly, has the question only surfaced now? The brute facticity of ethnographic regions has in some respects (though only some) been eroded since the Second World War by mass migration and by changes, again, in who reads what.

The 'ownership' of ideas has become (always was, perhaps) problematic, and the status of pan-national intellectual interests deserves careful study—so too does the status of pan-national intellectuals, which in some degree is what we are, engrossed with a world whose centres deny their presence.¹⁷ Instead, there is usually the kind of muddle one sees on such course-flyers as one for 'Comparative Literature 790: Third World Literature and Literary Theory', at the University of Michigan in 1988:

literary theory has been challenged in the last ten years by scholars coming from 'Third World' countries (Fernandez Retamar, Said, Spivak, Christian)...; what kinds of research programs and teaching goals [should we] envision.... If the essence of literature is called into question, what is left to compare?

And so on in familiar style. But Said, for one, is about as much a 'Third-World author' as Isaiah Berlin (rather less so, if anything). The rhetoric makes sense in a setting of pluralist politics where there is mileage to be had from 'ethnic' claims, but that sense is scarcely analytical. One may sympathize with Said's politics

16. Published since 1988 by the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

17. Recent 'critical' language has been oddly weak for discussing this. If, for example, Tambiah and Obeyesekere happen both to be Sinhalese by birth and both are noted anthropologists, one cannot then say of Sri Lanka that 'the Other perhaps more than the foreign anthropologist has had a voice in the orientation of research' (Kapferer, p. 281)—if one knows who these people are, they cannot be faceless.

(heaven knows, what upset him is real enough) and admire his literary criticism, but not, I think, elide them in this latter-day Negritude. More to the point than ethnic claims would be where we all work and in what connections, which is something anthropologists might place on their new agendas.

Though imitated by the *Guardian* newspaper, the language of pluralism will lack the same power in this country until Europe becomes more federal. In the wider world, however, something like it has been prominent for many years (see Fardon 1987) and does much to constitute our unthought objects of interest. Like nations, we see it discussed too little here. Instead, the hegemonic discourses dealt with in the Fardon volume are mainly the older ones, which seem more obviously Eurocentric: under British rule, caste in India came in fact to be something like Westerners thought it was (Burghart, p. 263); in Indonesia *adat* meant that custom of the sort abstracted from life by anthropologists became law (Hobart, p. 316); 'liberal' models, more recently, were made dubious reality in Aboriginal 'home-land centres' (McKnight, p. 59). But the locals were by no means passive: Hocart's Singhalese assistant, Senerat Paranavitana, for instance, became an epigraphist and an important figure in Singhalese nationalism (Kapferer, p. 288)—shades of folklorists and lexicographers in Europe—a figure in a history where Hocart and caste might look to have different values.

The complicity of anthropology in these old concerns would seem less distant were they placed in their current setting, where the past has always been remodelled and a pristine 'other culture' is plainly beyond reach. McKnight comes closest, perhaps, discussing Aborigines. But papers on the Americas (particularly contemporary North America) and on work in Europe (see now, McDonald 1989) would make clearer the entanglements from which the end of colonialism does nothing at all to free us. Nothing could, of course; nothing should. But the context of anthropology needs more obvious comment than it seemed to previously.

Us and Them and the Dreaded Other

Schwab's *Oriental Renaissance* (1984) remains, so far as I know, the only work to explore at all fully a mutation that set 'the East' (primarily India) at the centre of Western thought and set everyone from Goethe onward learning 'Eastern' languages for a meaning thought missing from Europe's history. By now it is a commonplace what role timefulness played in this process—and in modernist literature also: it is in *The Magic Mountain*, after all, not a linguist's tome, that one finds the timeless sanatorium, removed from the world, described as having 'too much of Asia' in it. More generally, the great works of modernist writing can all be seen as responding to a sense that time in the West was somehow filling up and lives were becoming disciplined by a common time in which we lived willy-nilly:

hence a search for sense outside time—in the east, among the primitives, in myth, the unconscious, and, perhaps not least, the ethnographic present.¹⁸ But the subjects of these dreams were busy dreaming also, often in the terms despaired of: ‘European Australians...are trying to replace history with myth, while the Aborigines...have taken up history to replace their lost mythology. But then, who taught them history?’ (McKnight, p. 44). The brutality of the Australian case is not in doubt—its sheer contemporaneity is unsettling also, but the product is of a kind that recurs very widely and has done so for at least two centuries. By comparison, anthropologists are late-comers, not autonomous. Our indecision over how to get on with academic historians denotes the larger context within which, historicize as we may, we are always slightly out of place.

History as an ideology has spread, with sometimes unsettling results. Despite some feebleness in the West itself (whereby, for instance, would-be radical ‘post-modernists’ and Francis Fukuyama woke up in the same bed), the world at large has rather taken to history. No nation lacks one of its own, no matter how contrived, and nations conceive their relations with each other in historical terms: the very language of ‘development’, for instance, presumes a unitary chronology. This too is unevenly distributed. If the cry in studies of the erstwhile orient has been to historicize everything (‘timeless’ is a fierce term of disapproval), then where history is the dominant means of self-definition, as usually it is with nation-states, it throws up its complement.¹⁹ Anthropologists may fear they have treated ‘Eskimo culture’, for instance, as too timeless, but ‘the notion of a shared contemporary culture that derives directly from tradition is also the image of themselves that the Eskimos prefer to project to national government to support their claims for particular rights’ (Riches, p. 73). Woe betide the non-Eskimo (non-Inuit?) who dares historicize the claim. Ethnography cannot please everyone, but what it can do, at the risk of losing ‘market share’, is demystify what is said by whom. It no longer has much option. The metropolis and the periphery, if they were ever separate, are now practical parts of each other’s fantasy,²⁰ and historicity is increasingly played off not against the orient but against the motif of ‘indigenous peoples’ and of course ethnicity: merely to explain the details is to

18. For a useful overview of the famous novels, see Quinones 1985. Ardener’s suggestion (1989: 202) that Malinowski’s ethnography be viewed in the same light seems not to have won wide support; but there is indeed a sense in which Trobriand ethnography is comparable with Dublin on Bloomday.

19. Certain older oppositions are reworked in curious terms. Note how many anthropologists (periphery) are rushing to write linear, narrative histories, as if all the world should sound like Victorian England; while historians of Europe (centre) now write in the ethnographic present as if France, let us say, were colonial Africa.

20. Centre and periphery are now spatial versions of something more general—marginality, which may be more or less imposed or contrived. For a darkly amusing picture of the culture game played for cash prizes by ‘Native Americans’ and their neighbours, see Clifton 1990.

undermine someone's claims, if only those of the weekend supplements, and we are forced to 'strategize' with care.

Mere physical distance no longer counts for much. The Penan, once known, if at all, for their system of naming, have this year been on a world tour, the subject of congressional hearings, and are all but protégés of The Grateful Dead. To separate their claims from those of the *soi-disant* 'Celts' of Brittany (McDonald 1989)—polytechnic lecturers almost to the last man and woman—requires appeal to more than 'other cultures'. The complexities are real, the need to deal with them pressing. The current fashion for speaking of 'the Other' and homogenizing politics could not, on grounds of either timing or substance, be much worse judged—and the bland appeal to 'culture' more so. Essentialism is the last thing we need at present.

Few contributors to Fardon's volume miss the point that our terms of art are political capital, and that what were once local rhetorics are convoluted throughout much of what we read. The potential ironies (symptomatically, an overworked word) are endless. The convolution itself is evident from the fact that one can now, without care for time or space, quote Street quoting Akbar Ahmed quoting Malinowski: 'When I started fieldwork...the stage was set and waiting. I could therefore "put aside the camera, note-book and pencil" and "plunge into the imponderabilia of actual life...to grasp the native's point of view"' (p. 235). What did the natives call him, one wonders? 'Sir'? For Ahmed is a man of more weight in the world than most of us, district officer of North-West Frontier Province, scion of an important family, a dominant figure in Pakistani ethnology and, one gathers from those who work in those parts, a gatekeeping figure of some importance. He comes to dominate, quite oddly, Brian Street's own ponderously written piece on 'Orientalist discourses' (does the phrase look a little frowsty?) in the Persianate half of the Middle East. Street's essay turns out back to front. In heavily didactic tones, Street chastises Richard Tapper for chastising Akbar Ahmed, and himself ends up, quite unwittingly, casting Ahmed as an old-style 'native'—the kind of person whose utterances are data, not conversation. A lot of this has been going on.

The problem is compounded, if not produced, by 'metropolitan' self-delusion. Ahmed has his view of Pakhtun or Pathan ethnography, and Tapper has his reservations:

But this in an unequal contest in which to engage. Whatever power Ahmed may have or assert in his own contact with the western academic world, he cannot reverse the power structure and undermine the academic culture on the basis of the indigenous one.... Ahmed simply runs the risk of alienating his erstwhile tutors. (Street, p. 253)

Scary stuff on the Northwest Frontier that, upsetting one's old tutor. To delude ourselves that SOAS is a power at all comparable to the Pakistani government is scarcely helpful: if Tapper 'denigrates' Ahmed 'with all the authority of the metropolitan culture' (p. 254), we have to be realistic about what

that authority now amounts to, how this culture works and where SOAS fits into it. The appeal of 'Islamic anthropology' to British publishers would be worth analysis, as too would the relation between access to the British press and one's standing as an intellectual elsewhere, a relation that presumably works both ways and does much to define anthropology's value for all concerned. Ahmed's own vast list of newspaper pieces would make a fascinating study. We might even, unexciting though it is, decide on the merits of Tapper's and Ahmed's arguments. Academics, however, still restlessly dream of power: 'The academic...makes a different but no less telling contribution than the politician to the construction of Middle Eastern society as alien' (p. 240). And the opposite sex find us irresistible.²¹

To deal with complexities honestly (to 'speak from one's position', as the Marxists used once to say) requires a sense of proportion. When the author to whom James responds 'rubbish' comes floating across one's sights—'in order to turn myself into one of the Nuer people I took off all my clothes' (quoted, p. 124)—one has to be allowed a laugh. The Nuer too must be given space for their response, be it outrage, bafflement or a laugh of their own. Area ethnography leaves that space to a surprising degree, if only because it is open to detailed reworking. The idea of 'humankind' leaves less space. Culture, in the sense of something shared in their bones by those we write about, leaves less again.

21. This hubris seemed laughable to start with. The experience of the Gulf war since then should have rubbed academics' noses in how marginal they are to collective fantasy as well as (which they knew already) to the forms of power. A colleague who wrote an excellent book on pre-invasion Kuwaiti politics was typical: one phone call from the media to know how many wives Shaykh Jabir had, and an invitation to appear on 'Geraldo'—which, wisely, she declined.

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THE DECLINE OF THE ZOROASTRIAN PRIESTHOOD AND ITS EFFECT ON THE IRANIAN ZOROASTRIAN COMMUNITY IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

SHAHIN BEKHRADNIA

Introduction

It might reasonably be assumed that clergy play an important role in maintaining the traditions of a religion and, therefore, that a decline in their numbers would be accompanied by a corresponding decline in the strength of the religion. The case of the Iranian Zoroastrians,¹ however, seemingly refutes such an assumption. In the early years of this century, a sharp decline in the number of the clergy was accompanied by the opening of Zoroastrian schools, migration to the capital, Tehran, and an increase in the number of well-educated Iranian Zoroastrians. A period of relative security and prosperity between the 1950s and 1970s lulled the community into believing that religious toleration in Iran was irreversible. Responsibility for the transmission of community history and religious knowledge was then relegated to teachers, whereas in the recent past this teaching had been

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1. For a brief introduction to the history and geography of Iranian Zoroastrianism, see Bekhradnia 1991.

the responsibility of parents. Between 1956 and 1966 the balance between rural and urban populations was reversed. Schools became increasingly secularized and fewer children knew about their traditions. Then, in 1979, the Islamic Revolution dramatically changed the situation. Religion became a compulsory subject at school, while distinct social and economic pressures forced an awareness upon all Zoroastrians that they were different; yet expressions of respect from Muslim Iranians both inside and outside the country made Zoroastrians particularly proud of their principles and history. Simultaneously, there were more participants at Zoroastrian religious and social occasions, indicating a rekindled sense of community and identity. More recently, with indications of large numbers of Iranian Muslims seeking a self-asserted Zoroastrian identity, together with the expression of Zoroastrian identity by some Yazidi Kurds,² some Tajiks and some Azerbaijanis, the Iranian Zoroastrian identity has also acquired a political and quasi-nationalist dimension. Some rituals and traditions survive, although they are observed in the main by elderly rural people.

The decline of the priest's caste among Iranian Zoroastrians is not a new phenomenon. The text *Dadestan i Denig* reveals that even as far back as the ninth century, Manuchehr, the Zoroastrian high priest of Fars and Kerman, was lamenting the difficult conditions that the Zoroastrians were obliged to endure as a result of the Arab invasion two centuries earlier. He was quite clear about the consequences for the clergy and did not castigate those priests whose sons did not follow in their footsteps, understanding that the economic rewards for priestly activities were simply not adequate for some people (Kreyenbroek 1987: 188). It was thus envisaged eleven centuries ago that many of the sons of priests might no longer follow in the footsteps of their fathers as the tradition had required (and has continued to require). But in the event, there seem to have been enough people able to retain and transmit traditions pertaining to their religion right through to the nineteenth century, despite many periods when Zoroastrians in Iran suffered evidently heavy declines in their population.

The nature of the knowledge handed down is interesting; much of it might be characterized as traditional, yet it is still difficult to conjecture how much was innovation, reflecting facets of society at particular periods. Furthermore, many of the clearly religious observances did not require the participation of a priest, but were domestic or neighbourhood occasions that the laity themselves organized.³

2. One member of this community has written a tract claiming Zoroastrian identity for the Yazidi Kurds, whose population stands at between two and three million; see Yazidi 1983. However, his claim to leadership and the veracity of his statements is disputed by a Yazidi Kurdish informant in London.

3. The importance of domestic organization of religious life corresponds to women maintaining the Little as opposed to the Great Tradition. The prominence of the rituals of Yazdi village women devoted to various *kheirat* as well as Bibi Sehshanbeh and Moshegelgoshah exemplify this. See Sered 1986 for the Jewish case, and see Atkin 1989 for the survival of Islam through folk or village practice in Soviet Tajikistan.

The Decline of the Priesthood

The decline in the number of priests (inherited through the male line within priestly families) is evident in a detailed headcount of 1891 (Azargoshasb 1973: 110-11). By that time, the main body of Zoroastrians in Iran lived in or around the towns of Yazd and Kerman, on the edge of deserts in the central south-east of the country where both the terrain and climate are harsh. There were 63 priestly families in Yazd,⁴ but with only 35 individuals serving as officiants for a total Zoroastrian population of 6908 in Yazd and its 23 outlying villages. The shortage of male adults within the priestly families (one out of six of the priestly caste compared to one out of four or five in the non-priestly population) can be explained by migration. At the time they were in Bombay and other parts of India, earning money with which to support their families (since in both Iran and India they were paid only for each officiation). As, with their increasing poverty, the number of Iranian Zoroastrians dwindled in the nineteenth century, there were fewer people in Iran who either needed or could afford the priests' services. From the middle of the nineteenth century, when Parsee philanthropists decided to rescue Iranian Zoroastrians from their destitution, and because sea and rail links developed quickly at that time, it became commonplace to find Iranian Zoroastrians setting off for Bombay, as if to a promised land. Priests were able to ply their trade much more successfully in India than in Yazd, since there was a larger and wealthier Parsee population there (c.90,000 people).⁵ Furthermore, Yazdi priests were especially popular amongst both the Parsees (because they were considered authentic) and the migrant Iranian Zoroastrian community. Their absence from Iran thus explains the anomaly of a low adult male priestly population.

However, there are further problems associated with this headcount. The size and reproduction of priestly households was significantly curtailed: 62 boys and 36 girls within 63 households gives an average of just 1.5 children per household; while amongst the lay Zoroastrian urban population of Yazd, households averaged 5 children (202 girls and 202 boys). These contrasts may perhaps indicate a relative inadequacy of the material means to maintain a family among the impoverished priests, in contrast to the relatively prosperous Zoroastrian townsfolk.

Levels of literacy are also indicative of the wretched plight of the priests. Although it might be expected that priests would have a higher level of literacy than the lay population, the headcount reveals that in 1891 only 65% of adult priests in Yazd were literate, compared to some 68% of lay urban male adults. Yet amongst the priests, 58% of their sons were literate compared to only 23%

4. It might be assumed that since no breakdown for priestly and non-priestly families was given for Kerman, the size of the priesthood there was already insignificant by 1891.

5. The Parsees are descendants of Iranian Zoroastrians who migrated to India in the tenth century.

among the sons of laymen. From this one deduces that there was a greater number of literate adult lay males than there were priests, possibly reflecting new needs for literacy in the practice of trading enterprises. On the other hand, the higher percentage of literate sons of priests suggests that a considerable value was being placed by priests on the ability of their sons to read and write. These skills were in fact the first step to an escape route from the priesthood, the profession of priest being understood by practising priests to be an effective guarantee of low income and status. Indeed, most of the first generation of Iranian Zoroastrian professionals (doctors and engineers) came from priests' families, while the lay public excelled in trade, property speculation, and farming, the latter occupation holding limited prospects for the future, given the increasing desertification of Yazd.

Just as in the ninth century, when Manucheher the high priest recognized a problem for the future of the priesthood, so too did Dastur Namdar e Dastur Shahriar, the high priest in the early years of the twentieth century. Like so many other priests from Yazd, he was often away on trips to India, and so he vested his general authority in a council of priests (*kankosh e mobedan*) which he set up in 1916. His cousin, Dastur Mehraban e Tirandaz, presided over the council during his absences, and the council of priests made decisions as a body. Subsequently, Dastur Mehraban's nephew and son-in-law Rostam took over the presidency of the council. Between the 1920s and 1930s there were about 85 priestly households in the priests' quarter in Yazd, but the number quickly dwindled since most priests began to move their families to Tehran, where better educational opportunities and careers were available for their children. By 1944, most priests had moved to Tehran and the council was dissolved. In 1952, the council of priests was reconvened in Tehran under the presidency of Mobed Ardeshir e Azargoshasb, who is regarded by most Yazdi families as the high priest, by virtue of his genealogy and knowledge, since he is the son of Dastur Namdar e Dastur Shahriar, the founder of the priests' council. He actually supplied me with this information and claimed that the title of high priest (*dastir e mas*, more formally *dastur e dasturan*) was bestowed by popular assent. He acknowledges, however, that any decision relating to religion is made by the council, which nevertheless shows great respect for his opinions.⁶

From the mid-1950s onwards, there were few practising priests left among Iranian Zoroastrians, and the council was opened to all *dasturzadeh*, i.e. men or women who could claim paternal or even maternal descent from the families of priests. By 1978, when I was last in Iran, there were only five practising priests in Yazd and eight in Tehran, all aged over 55, being paid by the *anjoman* or Zoroastrian council. One Parsee priest had been brought over from India, but he was not able to communicate with his congregation, i.e. those within his *husht* or parish, nor was he familiar with the Iranian Zoroastrian way of celebrating

6. In the summer of 1991, an official publication of the Priests' Council of North America referred to Mobed Ardeshir's brother, Firooz, as the high priest, possibly because of Mobed Ardeshir's ailing health and old age.

religious occasions, though he obviously picked up some ideas of how things were done while in Iran. In 1991, an informant surveyed the situation there and reported three priests in Yazd, one in Isfahan and five salaried priests in the Tehran area.

Religious Education

According to older informants, children used to learn about their religion and how to say the Avesta or holy texts, simply by spending time in the company of adults.⁷ They would listen with great attention when their elders sat around a brazier on winter evenings telling stories from the *Shahnameh* (the tenth-century Persian epic 'Book of Kings') and lamenting the onslaught of the Arabs. It was not the priests who passed on knowledge to the children of a community but the parents, the mother usually being more available and also usually the more pious and regular in the observance and performance of rituals, as well as more inclined to story-telling. Communal religious occasions, which almost always involved communal eating (for example, *osh e kheirat* or charity stews, the cooking of *sirog* or sweet spiced fried bread and Gahambar commemorations six times a year), were an integral part of community life in which the children participated with all the members of their families. The annual spring visits to the shrines and the major festivals of Nowruz, Tirgon and Mehrized were part of the regular annual calendar that everyone in Yazd observed. Children would be expected to undergo their Sedreh Pushi (initiation ceremony) before puberty, but not all children experienced the official ceremony, usually because it involved the laying-on of hospitality for a number of guests.

By the 1920s, each of the 26 villages around Yazd containing Zoroastrians had a school for Zoroastrian girls and boys, run by a Zoroastrian headteacher, and often paid for by Parsees. Zoroastrian schools for girls and boys had also been

7. The word *avesta* is used by Iranian Zoroastrians to mean the whole body of holy texts, from which a number are regularly recited as prayers. The language of these texts varies, reflecting the time of their composition. Thus the most ancient are totally unintelligible to Iranian Zoroastrians, while others of much more recent origin are in part fairly easy to understand. The texts were written down as well as orally transmitted, but it is said that Alexander the Great's invasion in the fourth century BC and the Arab invasion in the seventh century AD destroyed the bulk of the recorded material. Even when new records were compiled from orally transmitted texts after the Arab conquest, these were regularly destroyed by hostile rulers. Thus oral transmission assumed particular importance. When Anquetil du Perron went to India in 1758, specifically to investigate the Zoroastrians there, he was the first European to find them in possession of texts, which he studied for two and a half years with the assistance of one of their priests (see Firby 1988: 155). He cross-checked them for accuracy and consistency, and was persuaded that they were authentic, being composed in an ancient Indo-European language.

founded in Tehran. Religious education, including the teaching of the Avesta, was integrated into the school curriculum. Thus the responsibility for teaching the children Zoroastrian history and traditions passed from the parents to the teachers. Of course, some parents did continue to teach their children what they knew, but with the opening of the schools, and the drift to Tehran, the number of parents who did this gradually declined. Since Zoroastrian schools were never exclusively for Zoroastrian children, they began to attract a large number of Muslim children as well, many parents (including Reza Shah, the founder of the Pahlavi dynasty in 1925, and many of his ministers) believing that the standard of education and upbringing was better than the available alternatives. This sharing of Zoroastrian schools with non-Zoroastrians resulted in less emphasis being placed on Zoroastrian religious education during school time. Meanwhile, a youth wing of the *anjoman* council, the *sozemon e fravahar* or youth association, was created to make up for the lack of education in schools.

The Islamic Revolution

Although the 1979 revolution has had all sorts of effects on the Zoroastrian community in Iran (including the prohibition against Zoroastrians running Zoroastrian-founded schools), one of the results has been a reinvigorated sense of difference between Zoroastrians and Muslims. This in turn has manifested itself in an increase in the number of people coming forward to take the priesthood examination (although they do not necessarily practise as priests afterwards). It is also reported that more children are having their Sedreh Pushi or initiation ceremony performed. The demand of the present regime that all children must be examined in religion means that the youth association plays a very important role in providing religious education within the community. Interestingly, this revived interest appears to have resulted in more people wearing the traditional symbol of Zoroastrianism, the *koshti* cord worn around the waist, something that very few Iranian Zoroastrians were doing even in the villages of Yazd in 1976.⁸ At the same time, because the revolution created a large diaspora, consisting of approximately one-third of the Iranian Zoroastrian population (up to 10,000 Zoroastrians are said to have left Iran), the need was felt for the establishment of a priests'

8. Most Zoroastrians seem to have given up wearing their *koshti* upon moving to Tehran. Certainly, many informants from Yazd associated the end of their *koshti*-wearing with their entering a much larger community of non-Zoroastrians, such as at school or training college. The Parsees, in contrast, lay great store on the wearing of a *koshti* and insist that a person not wearing a *koshti* cannot possibly be a bona fide Zoroastrian. This was graphically illustrated to me in 1978, when two well-known Iranian Zoroastrians and myself (all of us attending the Third World Zoroastrian Congress) were denied entry to a fire-temple in Bombay on the grounds that none of us was wearing a *koshti*.

council of Iranian Zoroastrians in North America where the majority had settled (the council's composition consisting again almost exclusively of *dasturzadeh* rather than practising priests). Furthermore, as communities of Iranian Zoroastrians formed in the United States, Canada and Britain, with few practising priests amongst them, *dasturzadeh*, or sons of priests (few of whom had passed the examination granting them official entry into the priesthood) began to officiate when required for particular occasions. Young members of the community, who had not shown the remotest interest in their cultural heritage before their migration from Iran, began to attend and help organize such community events as the festivals of Jashn e Sadeh, Jashn e Tirgon and Nowruz. They also began organizing such social events as discos, excursions and sporting fixtures for members of the Iranian Zoroastrian community in their vicinity.

These activities suggest an increasing awareness of religious cohesion and a community united by a common cultural heritage, rather than apathy and a lack of interest. Unfortunately, it is not yet possible to assess the longer-term significance of this increase in religious awareness for the cultural attributes that will be associated with post-revolution Iranian Zoroastrianism. However, it cannot be disputed that during the years before the revolution, the number of priests and initiations, the attendance at fire-temples, and general interest in the religion was declining. In general, the move from the rural to the urban context that occurred mainly between 1956 and 1966 dramatically affected the frequency and the nature of religious observances.

The Significance of the Rural Context

It should be remembered that for centuries Zoroastrianism was practised and understood within a framework bounded by an agricultural way of life. Prior to the 1950s and 1960s, when an urban experience became common for the majority of Iranian Zoroastrians, almost all religious observances were expressed in idioms or symbols embedded within a rural culture. For example, the significance of eating meat on an important festival day (such as the coincidence of the day of Mehr and the month of Mehr, i.e. the 16th day of the 7th month) needs to be appreciated as a practice of subsistence farmers who could not afford to deplete frequently their modest stock of animals. The rare treat of eating roast lamb on an important holy day was thus much looked forward to and regarded as a reward for hard work. The foods distributed at the Gahambar memorial celebrations (occurring six times a year, each over a five-day period) and during weddings were merely the foods that were available locally: that is, nuts and various dried fruits together with sugar-coated nuts and other white sweetmeats, known collectively as *lork*. Similarly pragmatic explanations could be given for the frequency of distributing *sirug* (fried bread) and *osh* (pulse and vegetable stew). The reverence

for fire could also be explained by the practical experience of daily life where fire was essential for warmth, cooking and light, all of which are necessary for a reasonably comfortable though simple life-style. At the same time, fire was seen as symbolizing the life energy and as a symbol of eternal truth. The respected status of water was similarly reinforced by an absolute dependence on irrigation to cultivate crops in particularly hot and arid conditions: it is understandable how water might assume sacred associations in drought conditions.

The attitude towards these elements helps to explain the unique Zoroastrian way of disposing of the dead. Using the *dakhmeh* or tower of silence obviated the need to use the good earth for the disposal of corpses: soft earth that could be dug was used for cultivation, not for the proliferation of putridity. The towers were located at some distance from human settlements, on mountain tops inaccessible to all but the corpse-bearers, so that communities should not be affected by disease-ridden corpses. (It has also been suggested that the towers developed from the need to find effective ways of speedily disposing of large numbers of dead after a battle or a massacre.)

The distinction between pollution and non-pollution extended to the human being. Contact with corpses, blood, saliva, nails and hair was avoided or at least minimized.⁹ These attitudes were translated into ritual practice during menstruation and death, thus giving rise to the observation of purity laws or *pak o pacholi*. From discussions with older informants, during whose lives these purity laws were observed, it would certainly seem that ordinary rural people understood these ancient ritual practices through their own practical 'common sense' interpretations. Is it too fanciful to suggest, like them, that the concepts of purity and pollution were merely a schema into which elementary hygiene laws were encoded?¹⁰

Most of these practices are regarded by non-Iranian Zoroastrians as features that, individually or together, set apart Zoroastrians from other religious groups. Indeed, in discussions with some Western scholars it has been suggested to me that the purity laws were dreamt up primarily to distinguish very clearly those people who did observe them from those who did not, thus serving to demarcate real Zoroastrians from the rest. Scholars, Parsees and some urbanized Iranian Zoroastrians have an image of authentic Zoroastrianism as a religion that must be expressed through such traditional rural observances, the absence of which they lament as indicative of the passing of the true religion. While it may be true that such practices are to be found uniquely amongst Zoroastrians, it is not necessarily true that they constitute the essential principles of being Zoroastrian. This view is endorsed unconsciously by Iranian Zoroastrians who have continued to practise many of the so-called traditional rituals, but who have also adopted modifications

9. The procedures pertaining to purity and pollution are derived from the Zoroastrian texts known as the *Videvdat*, an Avestan-language text, and also from the Pahlavi *Vendidad*. For further discussion, see Choksy 1989.

10. See Douglas 1968: 45, and Irani 1990.

to traditional practices. For example, nowadays the majority of Iranian Zoroastrians do not live in close-knit neighbourhoods. Thus in Tehran or Los Angeles, the charity stews are no longer held within a local neighbourhood, nor are the Gahambar periods kept six times a year, nor do they necessarily consist of a distribution of oven-baked bread and local fruits and nuts or pulse and vegetable stew. A Gahambar in an urban context is much rarer than it is in a rural setting, partly because it is dedicated to the house where the person bequeathing it used to live (which was until recently usually Yazd), and partly because neither Tehran nor London (nor for that matter any other urban situation) is an appropriate setting as there are no specifically Zoroastrian neighbourhoods. And when they do take place outside a rural context, being rarer and people having to travel from much farther afield to attend, it is more usual to serve a meal than merely to hand out bread, dried fruit and nuts.¹¹ Because urbanized Zoroastrians today eat food in greater quantities and of much wider variety, it is thought that their expectation of what is fitting to receive or serve at a Gahambar has risen. To provide more than the traditional bread and *lork* is too expensive, and perhaps for this reason too, Gahambars are declining.

Methods of disposing of corpses have also changed with the move to an urban context. Burial and cremation have become acceptable to almost all Iranian Zoroastrians, even to those brought up within traditional priestly homes, and during whose early years only the *dakhmeh* was known. Not one of my many informants could give even one example of a person undergoing today a Noshveh or purification rite, a common enough practice a few decades ago. Neither could any of my female informants think of anyone who still went into segregation at menstruation, even though such was the norm (expected to be strictly enforced within priestly families) just a few decades ago and within the first-hand experience of many of my informants. A vestigial trace of such observances is present in the fact that even today girls and women brought up in Tehran or the West, as well as Yazd, will not usually enter a fire-temple during menstruation. These people, however, are regarded by fellow Iranian Zoroastrians as the most traditional because of the very fact of their attendance at holy places and their daily prayer recitals, observance of the Zoroastrian calendar, regular attendance at fire-temples and observance of meat abstinence days. People considered most traditional may also continue to maintain observances for the souls of the departed, but very few people still maintain *all* the observances that would have been the norm in Yazd and Kerman 40 years ago.¹² The festivals of Tirgon and Mehrgon

11. Dried fruit and nuts are still handed out at weddings (including those taking place outside Iran), often a small symbolic amount being elaborately wrapped in decorative green or white net and handed to each guest and also sent to absent guests. *Lork* has thus acquired the function of representing an aspect of traditional Zoroastrianism.

12. I witnessed a rather poignant scene not long ago at the funeral of a family friend who provided me with her life story. Her daughters had been educated in the West, had married non-Zoroastrian husbands and thus had had little contact with the Zoroastrian community since their

are still celebrated by some communities, but the practices (and the names in some cases) associated with them are not necessarily the same as they once were. In the case of Tirgon, tying seven coloured ribbons to the wrist and pouring water over passers-by, followed by a kind of fortune-telling (*chakeh dulong*), is no longer feasible. In the case of Mehrgon, as eating meat is largely taken for granted nowadays, having a feast built around a roast lamb is not such a noteworthy occasion and the celebrations do not feature prominently. It is nowadays commonplace to find Iranian Zoroastrians, either as a community or as individuals, maintaining disparate aspects of what is termed traditional. They have no difficulty in recognizing themselves and others as genuine Zoroastrians, despite the non-observance of the many purity laws that even within their own lifetimes had once been strictly applied.

Conclusion

The Islamic revolution in Iran has brought back into sharp focus the moral values and principles for which the Zoroastrians have suffered such a long history of persecution. Among younger members of the community, these moral values of Zoroastrianism seem paramount, while the importance attached to specific ritual is minimal. It is not the outward form of religion but the inner content that interests them; many simply consult the oldest Avesta texts, the *Gathas*, for a real understanding of their religious principles. The most popular expression of Zoroastrian values by younger informants took into account the importance of truth and honesty, the importance of honest work, the importance of helping others and charity, and the importance of respecting nature by planting trees, not polluting the earth, the water and the air. In other words, the Zoroastrian adage passed on through the centuries, 'good thoughts, good words and good deeds' (*pendor e nik, goftor e nik, kerdor e nik*) has survived.

I would contend that, while the lifestyle of the Iranian Zoroastrian has changed, and while many of the rituals traditionally associated with the priesthood and religion have disappeared, the changes do not necessarily imply that the ethical sense of being an Iranian Zoroastrian has been weakened. On the contrary, I would suggest that precisely because of the present political circumstances, Iranian

youth. They clearly wanted to do the right thing at the funeral in order to show the respect and love they felt towards their mother, and in the knowledge that she would have liked and expected to have a Zoroastrian ceremony. However, they were completely at a loss to know what ritual was expected of them. They illustrated very well the gap between the generation that was born and raised in Yazd and Kerman and the generation born in an urban context.

Zoroastrians have a strongly developed sense of their history, their principles, and their identity.

Even though the number of practising clergy has declined since the 1930s, their numbers may be once again on an upward curve. Because of events in Iran, and their political implications for Iranian Zoroastrians living abroad, as well as political events in nearby lands such as Kurdistan, Azerbaijan and Tajikistan, a new dimension has been incorporated into the concept of the Iranian Zoroastrian identity, a component that carries strong resonances of reawakened nationalism. Consequently, it may be said that the identity of an Iranian Zoroastrian is undergoing change. It has undoubtedly assumed a more secularized form and content: the outward form of the religion that the priesthood has helped to maintain is no longer as important as it was. Instead, its ethical ideology has acquired greater prominence and interest, and has assumed a politicized dimension. At what point does a group that is both referred to by others and refers to itself by reference to a religious category lose its genuinely religious connotations?

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BASKETMAKERS

MEANING AND FORM IN NATIVE AMERICAN BASKETS

edited by Linda Mowat, Howard Morphy and Penny Dransart

Basketry is one of the leading art forms of the Americas. From Tierra del Fuego in the south to Canada and Alaska in the north, baskets are integral to the daily life and culture of the peoples who produce them. Woven into people's lives, basketry has become a focus of cultural meanings and a source of reflection on the world. **BASKETMAKERS** is the first book in recent years to attempt to reflect the variety and breadth of basketmaking traditions across the continent. Leading experts in the field have contributed essays based both on first hand ethnographic research and on the study of museum collections and archives. The book's major theme is the way in which baskets are integrated as meaningful objects within the cultural and historical processes of different regions. It contains a wealth of information about basketmaking techniques, showing how technical, aesthetic and functional factors contribute to the final form. The book is also a celebration of Native American cultural achievement, emphasizing basketmaking as a continuing tradition that provides a means of asserting cultural identity. It will provide a major resource for the teaching of courses on American Indian culture, material culture and cultural anthropology, as well as for those interested in the study of museum collections and for craftspeople and textile enthusiasts.

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SOME BRIEF REFLECTIONS ON STRUCTURAL CONTINUITY IN CHINESE PEASANT SOCIETY

SELINA CHING CHAN

Introduction

A NEW book by Sulamith H. Potter and Jack M. Potter portrays the life of Chinese peasants in a district of Dongguan county, about half-way between Hong Kong and Guangzhou. *China's Peasants* compares the underlying structure of the society during three different periods: pre-revolutionary (before 1949), revolutionary and Maoist (1949–76), and post-Maoist (late 1970s to early 1980s). Using villagers' personal accounts, historical documents and information gathered in fieldwork, the Potters provide a comprehensive picture of the peasants' life. In addition to discussing the great tradition, formal party ideology and policies highlighted by the state and cadres, the Potters also concentrate especially on the 'little tradition', the actual daily activities of the peasants. Indeed, their book is one of the few published anthropological texts to draw on direct observation of, and participation in, life in mainland China since 1949.

At first sight, there seem to have been big changes in the 'traditional' pattern of peasant life after the revolution and throughout the Maoist regime. One only has to think of land reform (1949–51), collectivization, the Great Leap Forward (1961–63), and the Cultural Revolution (1966–76). Nevertheless, as the Potters acutely observe, these rapid changes are in many ways superficial. In a closer

investigation, one notices that there is a marked degree of continuity in the deep structure of the culture. The new socialist, collective forms of Marxist communism were subtly remoulded by Chinese minds and were indeed saturated with old structural ideas. After providing a brief summary of the main theme of the Potters' book, I want to try to suggest how one might provide a deeper understanding of the persistence of these structural forces with special reference to the notion of the 'individual', drawing, in particular, on my experience as a Chinese native of Hong Kong, particularly concerned with the study of my own culture.

A Summary of China's Peasants

Before the revolution of 1949, the peasants of the three major villages in Zengbu were organized as a localized, corporate, single-surname patrilineage (p. 252). The patrilineage thus formed the dominant social unit in the local area: all patrilineal residents were closely attached and subordinated to it. The élite and the gentry who had retired from the bureaucracy were the basic representatives of the lineage and were responsible for the daily activities of its members. They controlled its economic, social and political aspects, maintained its internal law and order and defended its interests against hostile lineages. Thus the lineage was a multi-functional organization.

During the Maoist regime, the subordination of the peasants to the lineage was opposed, since lineage organization was discouraged by the Communist Party. Under the radical collectivization movement of the Great Leap Forward, the collective production team became the only significant social organization in Zengbu. The collective production team was consciously created by the Party in order to lead the way to a new culture based on the values and ethical system of communism. It was conceived as a means towards revolutionary change, i.e. towards destroying the ideological pillars of the old culture, as seen by the new: familism, sexism, nepotism, blind marriages, clannishness and superstition (p. 95). It was intended that loyalty to the collective would replace loyalty to kin and lineage (p. 255).

In reality, no matter what form the collective took—team, brigade, higher-level cooperative or commune—it had a group of property-owning and managing, patrilineally related men at its core (p. 262). In fact, social ties formerly based on membership in a collective never superseded ties of affinal and consanguineal kinship. The old rules of patrilineal inheritance and patrilocal residence persisted unchallenged.

Potter and Potter note an even more striking connection between the content of the old lineage and the new collective (p. 263): that is, the relationship between the old lineage genealogies and the new household registers. The household

registers of brigades, like the old lineage genealogies, were documents that legitimized the membership and property rights of the men entered in them (*ibid.*).

Instead of the gentry and élite of the old days, today the Party controls local affairs through the cadres, who oversee such activities as the building of reservoirs, canals, embankments and pumping stations for drainage and irrigation. Indeed, the responsibilities formerly held within the lineage are now under the control of the collectives. Moreover, the cadres also act as intermediaries between the state and the public: they make persuasive visits to families reluctant about the implementation of collectivization (p. 65). This process of persuasion is actually a replication of the role the gentry and élite performed in the old days and is thus, again, not an innovation of the new order (*ibid.*). Through the cadres, individuals are under the total control of the production teams, brigades and communes. The individual as a team member is drawn into and subordinated to the group and is just as inseparable from family and lineage as in the days before liberation. As the Potters remark (p. 98), the new social form was inherently Chinese in enacting the same assumptions as the old.

It is possible, however, to take the argument further. The state, in fact, consciously encouraged individuals to challenge the dominant force of kinship structure. In the Cultural Revolution, children were taught to denounce their parents, the age-old institution of family and clan graveyards was discouraged and ancestral tombs were relocated (Hsü 1968: 603). In the Great Leap Forward, agricultural labour was relocated to produce iron and steel for the state. As Hsü (*ibid.*) remarks, it was the first time in Chinese history that people were encouraged to become aware of themselves as individuals in the direct service of the state rather than the family.

In the post-Mao era, the administrative reforms re-emphasized the importance of the single-lineage village, or a localized segment of a multi-village lineage, as a unit in China's rural administrative structure. The old village lineage community has been revived as an economic and administrative base (p. 257). Ancestral cults and dragon-boat races, both of which symbolize lineage identity, have also been revived. Overall, these revivals of the lineage village and its identity reveal the continuing dominance of the kinship ideology.

Although the ultimate ownership of land will remain collective under the de-collectivization movement, rights to the use of land are now being inherited by sons, following the old patrilineal inheritance rules (p. 266). The auction of rights to such collective property as land also follows the logic of the traditional relationship between the lineage and its ancestral estates and between the production team and its collective property (p. 173). The implementation of the production responsibility system in the post-Mao era, with its collective ownership and private management of the means of production, is a move towards an arrangement that resembles the handling of property and production under the pre-revolutionary lineage system. This production responsibility system is a mode of production in which households work on their own allotted share of land. The obligation to labour is derived from family membership rather than team

membership, and organizational decisions are made by the head of household rather than the team leader (p. 265).

To summarize: no matter whether before the revolution, under the Maoist regime, or after the Mao era, whether in the lineage or the collectives, the kinship system acts as a dominant multi-functional organization. Indeed, the collective team is structured and moulded on the implicit model of a traditional kinship group. As the Potters remark (p. 268), kinship structure is so dominant that it resists the sustained attacks of the revolution. To understand more deeply the persisting structural force of kinship, however, it is necessary to discuss, with some empirical examples, the notion of the individual in general. I am not going to give here an analysis of the relevant concepts like 'self', 'person' etc. I wish only to discuss the attributes and nature of this 'kinship ideology' with special reference to the individual.

The Individual in Chinese Philosophy and Society

Under the influence of Confucianism and Taoism, the Chinese have stressed equality among individuals at birth (Munro 1969: 179). Such an attitude implies that society is obliged to maintain the proper conditions for each individual to develop morally. But it does not follow that each individual should be treated equally as an adult (ibid.). This is a descriptive equality, different from the evaluative equality of the West, which implies the egalitarian treatment of all people. It is rooted in the Christian belief in the equal worth of men: God values all souls equally and does not recognize worldly hierarchical distinctions between men (ibid.: 2, 180).

The individual in Chinese society is bound by permanent ties that unite closely related members of family and clan into relationships of mutual dependence with hierarchical attributes (Hsü 1967: 291-2). This contrasts, for example, with the individual-centred American, characterized by a self-reliant personality and egalitarian attributes; his relationships with closely related human beings being only temporary. The Chinese mutual dependence relationship, with its hierarchical attributes, is rooted in the dominant dyad of father-son in the Chinese family (Hsü 1968: 583). It is also the basic content of *wu-lun*, the five main social relationships in Confucian thought: father-son, husband-wife, elder brother-younger brother, king-minister, and friend-friend. *Wu-lun* is a theoretical construct, but it affects the way people behave. In highlighting the *wu-lun*, Confucius enjoined individuals to act from the very earliest stage in the process of familial socialization according to their status in the social structure.

In each pair of social relationships within the *wu-lun*, each individual is influenced greatly by the expectations of the opposite party regarding his or her specific role positions, his hierarchical relationship between these positions, and

a code of conduct governing the relationship in terms of social norms and virtues. Indeed, the individual is supposed to act according to the famous Confucian doctrine of the rectification of names of status, *cheng ming*, which is based on the belief that once names of status have firm meanings they will serve as effective standards of conduct, so that a man in his role as a son must practise filial piety toward his father. The role expectation of each individual is thus defined in terms of his or her particular relation with a particular person.

The relationships between individuals in different kinship statuses can be compared with the ripples formed by the dropping of a stone into a pool (Fei 1947: 22-30). The place in the centre where the stone sinks represents ego's position. The ripples represent degrees of patrilineal remoteness from ego. In the innermost ripple are ego's father, mother and siblings, while other more distant relatives remain in the outer ripples (*ibid.*). Fei calls this 'differential hierarchy'.

In the Chinese social structure, the behaviour of individuals seems to be much affected, or even dominated, by their status in the social circle. The individual exists meaningfully almost solely within the context of a pair relationship or within a collective kinship category. More precisely, the individual is important only when he or she is encountering others in his or her differential, hierarchical social circle in a cluster of pair relationships. Each individual hardly has his or her own autonomy and will. This is very different from the 'individual' in the West with its characteristics of autonomy and self-direction, according to which an individual's thoughts and actions are mainly his or her own. He or she has the privacy to pursue his or her own good in his or her own way. The difference can perhaps be better understood with reference to three of the main activities of life: marriage, the birth of a child, and work.

As the Potters remark (p. 203), marriage in China is significant in social rather than personal terms. In the old days, marriage was not the concern of the individuals involved. The young were married without their consent and often against their personal wishes. Marriage is considered a collective affair, a matter between two families rather than resulting from the choice of the individuals. Indeed, individuals do not have autonomy and privacy in marriage. Apart from domestic convenience, the institution of marriage is also for the solemn purpose of 'perpetuating the descent line' (Hui-chen 1959: 88). A wedding is not an occasion for congratulations, it is a matter of generations succeeding each other (Goody 1990: 39). Marriage is a means for acquiring a woman who can give birth and perpetuate the man's descent line.

In the marriage ritual of Fukien, as described by Lin (1947: 48), the bride holds 'a bag of five happinesses', *wu-fu-tai*, containing five kinds of food, representing various desirable attributes in the production of sons: peanuts, *sheng-tzu*, symbolizing giving birth to a son; red prunes, *tsau-tzu*, symbolizing giving birth to a son as early as possible; melon-seeds, *to-tzu*, symbolizing numerous sons; and longan,¹ *lung-tzu*, symbolizing the son of the dragon, that is, a diligent

1. The fruit of the longan tree (*Nephelium longana*), akin to the lychee.

son. The bearing of descendants, as one of the core meanings in marriage, is expressed in other ways too. When my parents got married, in Hangzhou, in the Lower Yangtze River area of China, in the 1960s under the Maoist regime, my grandfather sent them a gift of a patch-work quilt. This is known as a 'quilt-cover of descendants', *tze-sun-pei*, and symbolizes the hoped-for numerous descendants. The quilt is made from 99 small pieces of colourful cloth by a woman who is prosperous and happily married with a number of sons and grandsons. The number '99' in Chinese is pronounced *chiu-chiu*, a term which also denotes 'that which is longlasting'. Thus the quilt symbolizes the hoped-for duration of the marriage. The meaning of marriage, as expressed both in the ritual and in the gift, focuses on the family as an enduring collectivity and particularly on the perpetuation of the man's lineage. The individual's self-interest and privacy are relatively unimportant compared with the interest of the family.

In addition, since the beginning of the 1980s, under the 'one child policy', each couple may have only one child. Some peasants, however, still try to have more than one, especially when the first is not a son, for a son is important for the continuance of the man's descent line. As one of the Potters' peasant informants said, 'You must have a son to carry on the family name. If you don't have a son, you won't have anyone to worship the dead parents' souls' (p. 249). Indeed, having children is not for the sake of the individual parents, but for that of the whole family, even the whole lineage. The interest of the family must come first, and this attitude is deeply internalized.

Moreover, if the cadres discovered that a pregnant woman had already had a child, they would try to mobilize her relatives to persuade her to have an abortion. The process of persuasion is directed not just towards the individual, but toward her relatives as well. This shows again that a birth is not an individual, private matter, rather it is a collective affair of the family and patrilineage. As the Potters say, the child-control policy is a system created under the pressure of population growth and does not respect the individual's exclusive rights over his or her reproductive capacity (p. 250). The concept of the rights of the individual is in fact never fully developed in Chinese culture as compared with the West; Chinese individuals mostly work according to their role and status in the interests of their family and lineage.

Next, I turn to the meaning of work for the individual in the Chinese context. As the Potters remark, in speaking of work, the villagers are speaking about the symbolic affirmation of human relationships (p. 194). Work is a value for the collective rather than the individual. Even in modern China, the individual is not fully free to choose his own job, generally it is assigned to him by the Party. Work is the symbolic medium for the expression of social connection; it affirms relationships in the most fundamental terms the villagers know (p. 195). It is believed that if human relationships at work are correctly communicated and practised, the social order will be correctly understood and practised as well. Individual satisfaction with work lags far behind the importance of working for the

family. In other words, kinship ideology and familism are more important forces than individual satisfaction.

Conclusion

To conclude, I agree with the Potters that although various social movements have superficially changed the life of the peasants and challenged the kinship structure, kinship still persists as the dominant structural core of Chinese life. Changes since the revolution of 1949 have not really disrupted the enduring form of Chinese society. From some points of view the revolution was only a rebellion.

Going further, however, I believe that the 'individual' in the Chinese context is created by his or her status in mutually dependant relationships with others, especially those within the kinship category, in a 'differential hierarchical' schema. This is very different from the Western sense of 'individual'. Indeed, the Chinese individual is dominated by his or her kinship relationships: family interests are prior to self-interest. Attitudes towards such 'private affairs' as marriage, the birth of a child, and work are dictated by the ideology of kinship rather than by the individual's independent decision. I believe that if we are to understand the persistence of the deep structural forces in Chinese society, we might usefully pay more attention to Chinese attitudes to the individual, attitudes very different from those with which people in the West are familiar.

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REVIEW ARTICLE

UNPACKING ANTHROPOLOGY

DAVID PARKIN

EDWIN ARDENER, *The Voice of Prophecy and Other Essays* (ed. Malcolm Chapman), Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1989. xxviii, 256 pp., References, Index, Tables, Figures, Frontispiece. £35.00/£14.95.

I

THIS is the posthumous volume that Edwin Ardener had once said (to this reviewer) would be the only form in which his most seminal essays would be published collectively. In fact, it did seem at one stage that the volume, or something like it, might after all appear in Ardener's lifetime. But, as if returning to the original prophecy, Ardener died suddenly (in 1987) and the volume was indeed mainly prepared after his death. As is common with scholars who die in the prime of their intellectual life, there have been many obituary tributes. There has already been so much said, including, in this volume, Chapman's introduction and postscripts by two other students of Ardener's, Kirsten Hastrup and Maryon McDonald, that it is difficult to avoid repetition. Let us then re-cast the exercise of the review in different terms, a task Ardener might have appreciated, and 'unpack', as he used to say, this volume in an exploratory way, discovering things about it as we define it.

II

Starting near the end with Hastrup's postscript, we find an exposition of Ardener's approach that is as clearly expressed as Ardener's own appeared elusive. It focuses on three of Ardener's notions: semantic density, event richness and historical density, which are neatly glossed as to do respectively with language, space and time. It is subtly expressed but also the most polished summary statement I know of the trajectory in Ardener's thought, shorn of all the inevitable untidiness that went into it, and one of which Ardener himself would have been incapable, so reluctant was he to stay for more than a moment with anything that looked like a definitive statement. As McDonald says, Ardener avoided the -isms and, as Chapman notes, he saw himself as ghosting between the interstices, difficult to pin down if you wanted a precise formulation. He regarded characterizations that began to assume theoretical status as always provisional, and no sooner had we begun to understand what a p-structure was in relation to an s-structure and how they derived from the idea of template, than we were carried on into language shadows, simultaneities and world-structures and, most intriguingly of all, as in the final chapter here ("Remote Areas"—Some Theoretical Considerations'), into such expressions of everyday English language as 'remote areas', whose excavation tells us more than any analytical term, but which may itself, as Ardener sadly warned, eventually suffer the fate of taking on analytical status.

Chapman has done a remarkable editorial job and has also provided an introduction that retains the freshness of Ardener's creative provocations. The volume comes across as autobiographical in multiple and unintended ways. The book is of and about Ardener's work and achieves that task well, but Chapman also comes through as an intelligent and sensitive interpreter whom one would like to emerge from the shadows, just as Hastrup and McDonald establish their own legitimacy (the latter seeming to reflect in her comments on Ardener's empiricism something of her own remarkable experiences working in Brittany—a kind of many-mirrored imaging of Breton authenticity). This is not to say that there has been a merging of student and master, but that among the very few anthropologists who would let themselves be *visibly* captured by Ardener's prose and thence by his ideas, most were his students. Of course, a very much larger number have over the years moved in his direction, though rarely aware of the influence and even more rarely acknowledging the triggering insight.

All this relates directly to the book's title and, most importantly, to the heart of Ardener's mission. The title is bold and risky, as Chapman notes, but is probably right because it forces us to focus on prophecy as an epistemological problem rather than as to do with fortune-telling or the like. As Ardener says, prophets do not foretell: they tell us what is already there, but at the time we cannot understand them. They see before them what for others is neither visible nor communicable in existing language but which, through non-verbal means, eventually makes surface sense as the underlying logic of events and tendencies begins to be articulated in a style that informs common understanding. But it is

not that the language catches up with the underlying pattern. It is that the new language and the pattern are indissolubly formed through each other.

It has become commonplace nowadays to scoff at naïve ideas of language as referential, as principally a means by which objects are concretized and labelled. To use Ardener's early phrase, we now all accept that the linguistic and the social penetrate each other and even that the linguistic constantly 'contaminates' the social, a general view towards whose contribution Ardener acknowledges (p. 39) the work of Needham, whose *Belief, Language and Experience* (1972) also became an important landmark. But it is not always widely known how and why we arrived at this position. For this reason, it is good that Chapman included (a shortened version of) the introduction to the 1971 ASA volume, *Social Anthropology and Language*, for it has almost undergone the full cycle of datedness, and seems ripe for re-release at a time when much of a whole new generation knows only the panic of 'relevance' and seems to be rebuilding the wall that separates the practical from the conceptual.

We have to abstract what is valuable, and it is still useful to remind ourselves of the three levels at which Ardener saw language and anthropology as being related—the technical, pragmatic and explanatory—in order both to dispose of them, as he himself did, but also to pause over historical traces that may again become interesting. For instance, Ardener was at the time writing with great adulation of Saussure and against older, reconstructionist philological work. At that time, the 'master exemplar' was *langue* and *parole* and attendant oppositions, each having relational rather than intrinsic value. 'Living philology' of the Henry Sweet kind was regarded as the non-relational interest of a Malinowski who sought meanings only or mainly 'in context'. Yet, while Ardener continued to regard meaning as resting on relational notions of opposition, his last works seem also to point in the direction of a kind of philology, as the chapter on remote areas suggests: like the apparent inarticulateness of the prophet, the everyday term or phrase (odd-job word?) hovers over an assemblage of possible actions, thoughts and language, which may or may not be realized.

It would have been instructive to have Ardener address within his scheme Lienhardt's insight (1988: 107), with which I concur, that African (and, I would say, especially Bantu) languages have extraordinarily transparent etymologies. I find that it is sometimes possible to trace complex vocabulary back to an apparently original meaning. The transparency is sometimes evident to the speakers, who therefore have their own, non-Western epistemological framing that, through its visibility, invites referential thinking; not with regard to objects, however, but to conceptual-semantic archetypes. Many Africanist ethnographers must have witnessed and marvelled at how a diviner or other sage unravels a complex semantic domain and poignantly reveals an alleged root. In such situations, less is hidden from us and we are that much closer to the apparent origins of ideas, so that the 'word' can and does take on great intrinsic significance that does not have to be explained relationally, although relational significance can be found in it too. It is at once archetype, realization and expression.

III

Here we come to what I regard as an interesting tension in Ardener's work. A paper that is not in the volume, but which must stand as progenitor of the rest, is the celebrated one (1970) on zombies and witchcraft, and their co-variation with poverty and economic boom, which was first presented publicly in 1967 and published in the ASA volume on witchcraft, but which in part is found in even earlier work. Here was born the idea of the template, the underlying assemblage of ideas that can only be given partial realization at any one time, giving the impression of surface differences, which are, nevertheless, cut from the same template. It is an idea that, unlike Geertz's (1966: xx) neat but throwaway usage in his famous paper on religion as a cultural system, was nurtured over the years and took increasingly fruitful form during the rest of Ardener's career. The tension I see in Ardener's work is between the similarity that this notion shows to a standard structuralist account and the empirical flexibility that it implies and that threatens to break the constraints of any structure.

This tension entered Ardener's own conceptualizations and language. Apart from learning in the first chapter (the ASA volume introduction 'Social Anthropology and Language') that it is not the Prague School model of phonemic opposition and distinctiveness that anthropologists should be emulating, but rather that of relational opposition and distinctiveness in general, we are introduced in the second chapter ('The New Anthropology and its Critics', the 1970 Malinowski lecture) to the idea of underlying programme, qualitative generativeness as opposed to quantitative predictability, and then in later chapters (principally chapter 5, 'Some Outstanding Problems in the Analysis of Events', which was first presented and circulated widely in 1973) to the distinction between paradigmatic and syntagmatic structures. Ardener called the latter p- and s-structures, not just as an exercise in abbreviation, but because he wished to emphasize that they were not quite the same as the Saussurean and later Lévi-Straussian concepts, though very much related to them. But what was the difference and why the hesitancy?

The difference is three-fold: of scale, of his perception of otherness, and of his vision of loose as against tight boundedness. For Lévi-Strauss, it is the great mythological and marriage schemes of the world to which we address our analyses. For Ardener, it is the nooks and crannies of existence: alleged witches hiding under blankets in tin-roofed houses; differences between Ibo and English handshakes; women returning from the Bakweri forest to scream at their husbands under the general complaint of 'bush'; or the irony of retired Americans and other incomers maintaining and refurbishing the traditions of the Hebrides. Ardener re-established the apparently trivial as of exemplary significance and dissolved otherness as a matter to be created (rather than discovered), as much at home as abroad.

The tension, then, is that Ardener commonly resorted, especially early on, to a vocabulary of obvious structuralist derivation (including, from among his terms not mentioned so far, 'black box', 'linear chains', 'output', 'binary distinctions'

and so on), yet was practising a methodology on the small things of life that could be found anywhere and at any time, were experientially unbounded (not at all like a structure) and among which the surface/deep or signifier/signified distinction was of the loosest kind. In this empirical respect he was closer to Barthes than to Lévi-Strauss, though he disagreed with Barthes' view that semiotics should be part of linguistics: Ardener sided with Saussure, who argued for linguistics as part of a wider semiotics.

Now it is certainly clear that Ardener subscribed to a general semiotics, in the sense that he wished to relate the different communication media through which ideas and actions inform each other. This indeed is his idea of the 'simultaneity': signification straddles different channels and alters as it is understood, explained, renounced etc. We change that which we interpret in the very act of interpretation, but it is change that is ultimately 'generated' by the phenomenon of which we have become part through our act of interpretation. This view is now familiar and has reached us in more episodic and less systematic fashion via Geertz. I say systematic because Ardener was clearly very conscious of what he had written beforehand, so that ideas are referred back and connected very precisely. Through this continuity of conceptual overlap, however, Ardener gradually substituted lateral homologues for hierarchical levels of the appearance/essence type. As the chronologically ordered chapters proceed, they rely less and less on the basic structuralist idea of surface and deep and turn instead to, at most, a distinction between the hidden and the evident (in events) that twists inside out periodically, producing what Ardener calls parameter collapse and which is probably akin to what others have called paradigmatic change. Thus, the study of marriage as an institution that legally contains among other things sexuality can so easily become the study of 'outside' marriages and thence of 'prostitution', which reverses the paradigm by showing sexuality now as 'containing' the law in the sense of commonly being outside and beyond it.

IV

Chapman was right to arrange the chapters in the chronological order of their first appearance rather than of their actual publication. For it is in this way that we can see the shift from quasi-structuralist language to a use of vocabulary that becomes increasingly everyday and descriptive. It is indeed a shift from 'genre to life', which is how Ardener describes, in the penultimate chapter ('Social Anthropology and the Decline of Modernism'), the decline of modernism and its successor.

Yet there are distinctive sub-themes that punctuate the flow at different points, and, while it is against the spirit of his work to abstract them as separable, they are bound to be addressed as such. Thus, the issue of how to measure events and people when these same phenomena never remain sufficiently fixed to be

measurable by set criteria, is especially treated in the chapters on population and ethnicity—‘Language, Ethnicity and Population’ (first published in *JASO*) and ‘Social Anthropology and Population’—but recurs in others. It is not just that human populations have the capacity, unlike animal species or plants, to redefine themselves (to call themselves by different ‘ethnic’ names) at the very point at which you put them in a category to be counted. This is one problem. Another more fundamental problem is that human ‘groups’ are also constantly re-evaluating the criteria by which they identify themselves. The demographer presupposes a standardization of his/her data by resort to what appear to be such universal measures as gender and age, and so irons out the creases that would otherwise appear in the concepts that lie behind such measures. As Ardener says, the outrageous or anomalous become susceptible to a levelling-out operation. In other words, before we measure we have to define the unit of measurement, and to define it means taking into account peoples’ own definitions as well as our own, which, as we know, are affected significantly by this very process. Ardener was well aware of the pitfalls of statistical ‘truths’, having worked in this area in his early studies of fertility and divorce. He saw the above, later, chapters as keeping us on constant alert for this mutual relatedness of measurement and definition, and to the fact that to measure is always to raise problems of definition. It was, as with other sub-themes, a challenge to the tendency in social science to privilege an alleged underlying statistical objectivity and to separate it from what some might present as surface deviatory behaviour.

The same concern comes across in the chapters—‘“Behaviour”: A Social Anthropological Criticism’ (another first published in *JASO*) and, to a lesser extent, ““Social Fitness” and the Idea of “Survival””—that reject both naïve and sophisticated arguments alike that animal and human behaviour can be understood as commensurately similar. In many ways, however, Ardener presents the problem as that of the impossibility of translating across cultures according to a universally understood code: for different cultures, read animal and human, and see this as allegorical. The argument for the incommensurability of cultures, echoed by Feyerabend and others, is well taken as a methodological starting-point. But how would Ardener have reacted to the extraordinary bio-genetic changes that are now envisaged within science, whose implications are of patterns that go far beyond our facile distinction between human and animal? These after all are theories that in their experimental practice are wreaking havoc with even our own anthropological ideas of kinship: who is the mother of the child, or to whom does the child ‘belong’, and what now the significance of oppositional patterns of relatedness? Are we far from the factory-like production of babies for whom the sentiment of kinship could only arise through adoption, and could a notion of incest, and therefore of kinship *rules*, have any significance in such a system? As Strathern (1992) has been showing recently, bio-power indeed.

V

The mention of power raises a perennial criticism of Ardener's work, which is that, in its concern with the apparently small things of life and with semiotics as itself one of the allegedly small things, it failed to grapple with issues of tyranny, of great historical changes, and with the common questions of statehood and people. I think it is perfectly true that with Ardener's approach you can, so to speak, paint yourself into a semantic corner and, with great finesse, do no more than counter such charges with the claim that it is precisely the small things that both make up the large and act as a conceptual basis for it. Ardener would probably have accepted this point, to judge by the pleasure he took when I once remarked that his work on 'the woman question' was really a political statement, or at least a study of the mainsprings of power differences. Certainly his three papers focused on 'the woman question' ('Belief and the Problem of Women', 'The "Problem" Revisited', 'The Problem of Dominance'; chapters 4, 8 and 12 here) reached out to a much larger audience than any of his others and played a major part in pre- and post-feminist debates. The last seemed most directly addressed to feminism and, using the origins of women's dominance by men as a 'vehicle', formulated the argument that minor, often biological differences, can become socially and then culturally elaborated to form the basis of class, ethnic and other major social divisions, but that human consciousness need not remain so 'false' and unquestioning that we are condemned to be permanently enslaved by such predispositions. The ending here, with its curious slide into an uncharacteristic universalizing plea for a happy ending, is clearly weak and seems to reinforce the claim that there is a need for some kind of accommodation with history, a task that may well be that of Ardener's posthumous volume on Cameroonian coastal society over the last three centuries that we are promised.

VI

Perhaps the best way to read the volume is to not take too seriously the earlier, though quite long-lasting structuralist-like concepts but to focus instead on the unfamiliar use of familiar terms. For example, we learn so much more about the problems both of prophecy and of how apparently different events are related to each other through the idea of 'blank banners' ('Social Anthropology and Language'; chapter 1) and its cognate, 'hollow categories' ('Social Anthropology and Population': chapter 7). The former describes that moment of hesitancy in the mobilization of a 'movement' when people gather for a purpose they know to be important to them but for which they lack the language to express it. The latter idea catches admirably the conceptual awkwardness of ethnic self and other classifications, which often seem to come from nowhere: an ethnic group suddenly

becomes a highly visible unit; a former such group seems equally suddenly to have no substance, for its members seem mostly to belong elsewhere; in-between such apparent transformations are the areas of doubt, uncertainty and reformulation, as those who were 'dying out' seem now to have regathered while those who were many and strong are now said to be dispersed or 'lost'.

The notion of 'event richness' is especially interesting. It seems at first sight scandalous to suggest that the Bakweri are event-rich, in that everything that happens seems to them to be unique and so to have new and special significance, and that the Ibo, on their own admission, are event-impoverished, by virtue of the fact that they lead routine lives laced with occasional excitement whose outcome is, however, seen to be broadly predictable within a narrow range of possibilities. One is reminded of Gluckman's (1962: 34) equally scandalous remark that technologically simple societies have more ritual than complex ones. But, as an aspect of self-definition and therefore of experience, such distinctions seem inescapable, although to go beyond this broad generalization to other more interesting statements makes increasingly imaginative demands that may well result in the analytical complexity that suffocates the inspirational value of using 'natural' language.

VII

This takes us on to the question of whether it is at all legitimate to ask where Ardener's work leads. He himself abandoned the structuralist load that he had had to carry first (at a time when few others were believers). In turning to non-structuralist vocabulary, he makes it quite clear in the later chapters that the very process of unpacking ordinary 'natural' language subverted its openness: instead of *experiencing* the difference between a remote and non-remote area, we shall, after reading the last chapter, *classify* it on the basis of ossifying criteria. This is part of the contamination of the social, not so much by language, as Ardener put it, but by analytical terms. The salvation, however, is that new everyday terms and phrases are coined continually in every society and are consubstantive with and perhaps constitutive of events and thought-tendencies within it. There is, therefore, always more ethnography where that came from.

Ardener, it is true, used only ethnographic snippets in his papers, and it is highly questionable whether he could have said more, theoretically or epistemologically, in a full-length ethnographic monograph than he did say, with such economy, in his short papers. I certainly benefit from rereading his essays, but I am also always left with a nagging worry that he offers us only succulent tastes of a meal that we shall have actually to cook ourselves. Perhaps that is a fair division of labour. Or perhaps it reflects the gap between anthropological theory and ethnographic narrative rather than any failing on Ardener's part. I

would still have liked to have seen Ardener write the Bakweri monograph, if only to learn what difference, if any, it might have made. I suspect none, which is no reproach, but a recognition of the need to distinguish frankly between the ethnography that painstakingly produces the insight and the elegant crystallization of the latter for more general consumption.

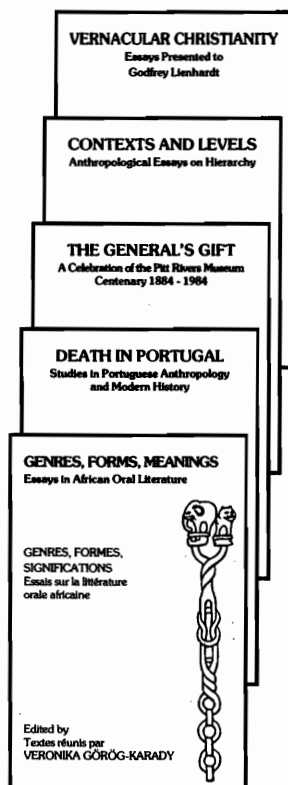
Others, including Chapman, Hastrup and McDonald, have written the book-length ethnographies that we still demand as evidence of apprenticeship in our trade, and these books are certainly highly regarded in the subject. The question that needs to be asked is how much one can tell nowadays from reading them that these and subsequent ethnographies have been shaped by Ardener's ideas. We know their tutorial provenance and can certainly see a distinctiveness. Yet, if Ardener's view of the prophet is correct, and if he was one himself, then his ideas will have passed, or will in due course pass, into common and unacknowledged usage, and as time goes on we shall not be able to recognize such distinctiveness. Prophets, after all, are unintelligible when they begin to speak, but, once their ideas are absorbed, become banal. By this definition, then, prophets only become so in retrospect, after their ideas have had their effect and become commonplace. It may be reassuring to suggest that, by this latter criterion, Ardener was not a prophet, for though he developed a language for empiricizing what we may identify as a structuralist and then post-structuralist trend in social anthropology that was often difficult to understand, and although many of his ideas have indeed percolated into the body of anthropological assumptions, there remain, especially in the essays gathered in this volume, intriguing suggestions and insights that will take a good few years yet to unpack and that remain far from banal.

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BOOK REVIEWS

DEBORAH B. GEWERTZ and FREDERICK K. ERRINGTON, *Twisted Histories, Altered Contexts: Representing the Chambri in a World System*, Cambridge etc.: Cambridge University Press 1991. xiv, 246 pp., References, Index, Maps, Photographs. £30.00/£9.95/\$44.50/\$14.95.

This is one of a number of important books, just appearing, that focus broadly upon the complexities of the ultimately unequal encounter between the West and various societies in the Pacific. Other examples include Nick Thomas's similarly titled *Entangled Objects* (Harvard, 1991) and Schieffelin and Crittenden's multi-perspectival account of the Hides patrol through Papua (*Like People You See in a Dream* (Stanford, 1991)).

The Chambri inhabit an island mountain in Papua New Guinea's Middle Sepik region. Culturally, they were dominated by their powerful Iatmul neighbours. Economically, they are members of a regional trading system (analysed by Gewertz in an earlier book) whose members were mutually dependent on each other's specialist products. The introduction of manufactured goods has both impoverished the trading system and created a need for cash. This the Chambri have few means of earning, apart from out-migration or selling artefacts (and Chambri culture more generally) to groups of tourists who travel up the Sepik River on luxury cruisers.

Chambri culture was documented earlier by Mead and Fortune ('the Tchambuli'), and Gewertz and Errington subsequently worked with the grandchildren of some of Mead's informants. This link is one minor skein of the title's 'Twisted Histories', which—through imagery, power, literacy, advertising and migration—tie the Chambri in complex ways to their anthropologists, to their neighbours, to tourists and to the Papua New Guinea state and world system more generally. 'Altered Contexts', the title's other half, alludes to the consequences for the Chambri of pursuing their cultural goals under these changing circumstances. At the most encompassing level, the authors suggest, these altered contexts can be grasped in terms of a distinction between 'commensurate' and 'incommensurate' differences. The mutual regional dependency of the trading system was one of commensurate difference; inequalities existed but were not structurally entrenched. The same is true of traditional Chambri social life more generally: differences in power and authority are quantitative and transient, so bigmen have potent rivals and humiliated initiates in turn become initiators. However, this system of commensurate differences has been contextualized by national and world systems, in which differences in development are hierarchical and incommensurate, and the parties involved are not mutually entailed as formerly.

The choices the Chambri make as they manoeuvre in these altered contexts, and the structural consequences, are documented and analysed through a number of sustained examples. The first two chapters focus upon the initiation ceremony organized by the powerful bigman Maliwan. Capitalizing on his links to the owner

of a cruise company, he invites tourists, and to their chagrin the authors, as paying guests. The revenue will allow Maliwan to fulfil traditional obligations; it will also bolster his claim to possess the power to attract resources (today, tourists), and to represent the Chambri to the outside world. The authors pause here to offer a succinct analysis of initiation as a process in which differences between the various Chambri social categories are first heightened and then resolved, the power of freshly unified adult society then being brought to bear upon the initiates. The Chambri at first attempt to incorporate the tourists as one further social category in this system of commensurate differences, but the tourists reject this classification in a variety of ways, maintaining themselves as separate, untailed and ultimately superior. Moreover, Maliwan's tapping of tourist wealth for Chambri ends has unintended consequences. Control of the initiation is taken partly from Chambri hands. As they schedule the initiation for the tourists' arrival and modify and re-run bits of it for their benefit, the Chambri begin to find themselves defined in ways they do not like and cannot control.

Chapters 3 and 4 focus respectively upon migration and the conflict between senior men and 'youth': linked topics because a major goal of leaving Chambri Island is to evade the power of senior men who control the marriage system. Western images of freedom, mediated through advertising, literature and music, are important stimulants to escape, yet few young Chambri who espouse 'freedom' consider themselves any the less Chambri for doing so. Much of chapter 4 concerns Nick Ambri, leader of the Yerameri Drifters Band, a Chambri James Dean. Nick chose to stay in Chambri and confront the power of the bigmen by marrying the girl of his choice; inevitably, in the Chambri view, he died, a victim of his father's sorcery. However, Nick Ambri's life becomes something of a youth manifesto. During his final funeral rites, which first evoke and then deconstitute Nick as a person, Chambri youth dress in sun-glasses and their most stylish clothes and stage an all-night performance of his music, thus claiming these to have been essential parts of his being. But though the objects that are invested in advertisements with ideas of freedom are commodities, the authors conclude that so long as the Chambri subsistence base remains intact, people can 'flirt with Western representations, using them for their own purposes, within a system in which their fundamental identity was not, as yet, class based' (p. 146).

The last two chapters examine 'The Written Word' and 'Negotiating with the State'. Like commodities, literacy belongs to a world whose incommensurate differences may be imported along with the practice of writing. The authors describe how their own field assistant, Godfried Kolly, is stimulated to embark upon an indigenous ethnography, recording ancestral deeds and attempting to resolve discrepancies between the different accounts he is given and the events recorded in the Bible; for he comes to see the two as identical, with initiation, for example, as baptism. In principle, this process of inscription meets with the approval of senior Chambri men, who are concerned about the decay of knowledge of ancestral precedent, and who also wish to confirm Chambri's position as the Rome of the Sepik (Chambri provided catechists for other Sepik areas). However,

knowledge of ancestral precedent is both secret and constitutes important political capital; consequently, Godfried's systematization may, potentially, make him the most powerful Chambri who ever lived. In practice, therefore, senior men decline to provide details of their secret knowledge, and literacy's latent capacity to induce incommensurate differences remains to date unrealized. 'Negotiating with the State' similarly documents Chambri rejection of the incommensurate differences entailed in modern statehood. The Chambri do not see themselves as ceding power to a superordinate body that will act in the equal interests of all citizens; for the Chambri, rights are produced by social relationships, not prior to them. The ramifications of this are examined through cases in which Chambri attempt to negotiate with the state as though it is another kin group and decide whether or not law-breakers should be handed over to the police.

Twisted Histories, Altered Contexts is compulsively readable, in part because the material is presented through specific cases and individuals—including the authors themselves, whose long-term links with the Chambri, and the writings that have resulted from it, become elements in Chambri history. In these respects, and in the concern with individuals' subjectivities that periodically surfaces, the book is reminiscent of Read's New Guinea Highlands monographs. But the book's readability also contributes to the authors' clearly stated political wish, not simply to document the Chambri experience of change, but also to 'provide the basis for a politically compelling acknowledgement of common humanity' (p. 21). To the extent that so well-written a book will be widely used in teaching (not least within Papua New Guinea), this is a goal that is likely to be achieved. There are, however, some costs to the book's accessibility. The key concept of 'development' and the distinction between commensurate and incommensurate differences are insufficiently worked through. There is a tendency to define differences in power and authority as fundamentally 'commensurate' so long as they are temporary, which in the long run all hierarchies are. Application of the commensurate/incommensurate distinction is also particularly intriguing given Simon Harrison's recent account, in *Stealing People's Names* (Cambridge, 1990) of another Iatmul-dominated Middle Sepik people, the Avatip. Harrison discerns as a major theme of Avatip history the long-standing endeavour by the largest subclan to appropriate the totality of ritual powers and thus to construct incommensurate differences.

But though some of the local-global interactions treated here—tourism, migration, literacy—could have been examined individually in greater detail, for me the originality of the book lies in its taking the whole *set* of interactions as the focus. In doing so, the authors also transmute into data much material that tends to get pushed to the periphery of specialist monographs, yet is nevertheless a substantial part of fieldwork experience in Papua New Guinea: assisting informants in their applications for provincial and national government funds; uneasily mediating between tourists and community; listening to senior men complain of 'bighead' youths and youths complaining of conservative and repressive seniors; being pressurized to write to the Queen in support of bigmen's campaigns to be

awarded the MBE; and observing the local political uses made of earlier anthropological publications. It is partly because the book accurately reflects these aspects of contemporary fieldwork that it is also so vivid an account of the complexities of the Chambri's present situation.

MICHAEL O'HANLON

ROBERT W. HEFNER, *The Political Economy of Mountain Java: An Interpretive History*, Berkeley etc.: University of California Press 1990. xxii, 251 pp., Bibliography, Index, Tables, Plates, Maps. \$34.95.

Hefner starts his study with the premise that 'recent attempts by interpretive scholars to represent social action as a "text", the significance of which lies in what the action "says" rather than what it "does"... are ill-conceived' (p. xii). His 'interpretive history' is avowedly Weberian and ultimately causal, and he writes with a sense that the formerly dominant modernization model for explaining change in the non-Western world by Western precedents has collapsed.

The mountain Java he writes about is actually the villages of the Tengger Highlands of East Java, more specifically those of the regency of Pasuruan and one in the regency of Malang. These people are sometimes depicted as remnants of the Hindu kingdom of Majapahit, persisting in a surrounding sea of Islamic culture, an issue that was the subject of Hefner's earlier book, *Hindu Javanese: Tengger Tradition and Islam* (Princeton, NJ, 1985).

Hefner notes that our understanding of Java tends to be based on a narrow, essentially lowland, conception of its regional variation and argues that greater attention needs to be paid to highland communities. Geertz has written about the religion and economy of Java based on research in a Brantas River valley community (Pare) as though it were representative for all of Java, and Hefner seems to do the same on a smaller scale, for, although he draws extensive contrasts between Tengger and lowland economy, he says little about other highland regions.

Hefner writes that though highland history is distinctive, it throws light on forces that have shaped Southeast Asia as a whole. He begins his account of this history with Singosari, the early thirteenth-century precursor to Majapahit, and continues on via the period of expanding Islam, the era of Dutch colonial rule, the Japanese invasion, the first decades of the Republic, the aftermath of the 1965 coup, through the 'New Order' government and the Green Revolution to the present. Necessarily, much of the information about this history does not derive directly from the Tengger Highlands. Nevertheless, Hefner effectively conveys the impression of a shifting pattern of circumstances and realities. Circumstances in Java have changed in significant ways, in large part because of overt government policies, since the early 1950s when Geertz and his colleagues were carrying out

the research of the so-called 'Modjokuto Project'. Consequently, recent studies, such as this one, have evaluated Javanese possibilities rather differently.

Hefner reaches a number of conclusions. Commercialization under Dutch influence did not revolutionize production, but led to changes in the relative ratio of staples to commercial crops. Capitalized production methods did not replace older forms, and the modest market-led expansion could not be sustained in the face of the depression and subsequent crises. The Green Revolution followed four decades of economic instability. Improved transportation, the use of fertilizers and new strains and crops, brought increased, if unevenly distributed, wealth, but the technology that has brought economic benefit has also brought ecological problems that threaten these gains. Agricultural changes have not produced proletarianization or the expansion of impersonal wage labour, and the emergence of more class-stratified villages has been muted by cultural norms of social autonomy: 'thrust into a national arena, these mountain Javanese sought not simply to maximize income or expand production, but to redefine community' (p. 29). Nevertheless, Tengger history shows that commercial change need not undermine traditional arrangements and that extended contact with capitalist economy need not lead to adopting all its features. The Tengger have managed to maintain a distinctive ritual and status scheme. In a pattern familiar throughout rural Indonesia, 'where wealth came into the village, it was carefully channelled into projects consonant with local forms of distinction' (p. 238).

Hefner appears never to refer to works in German. At any event, he does not discuss the German-language publications of Barbara Lüem, who has also recently studied the Tengger. Thomas Schweizer's recent *Reisanbau in Einem Javanischen Dorf* (Cologne/Vienna, 1989) discusses some of the issues taken up by Hefner and sometimes reaches similar conclusions.

Hefner has looked closely at an idiosyncratic Javanese region and used it as the basis for an ambitious review of the literature on Javanese economic development and a critique of social theory. His arguments are generally congenial and plausible. Java is, of course, one of the more important of the world's arenas for matching economic development to social need, and it is an overt testing-ground for development policy. As is to be expected, many of the factors affecting Tengger life are also important in Indonesian communities beyond Java.

R. H. BARNES

RONALD INDEN, *Imagining India*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1990. viii, 270 pp., Bibliography, Index. £39.50.

This is an important book, one that every anthropologist and historian of India should read. Some may come away irritated and carping at Inden's arrogance, but

they will not be able to deny the wit and agility with which he tackles no less a subject than the entire Orientalist edifice of knowledge of India. Moreover, while the anthropologist at least may feel that the alleged errors and distortions to which Inden draws attention are those to which he or she is now sensitized, by tracing the intellectual history of such errors and distortions Inden provides us with a valuable history lesson.

In brief, the book consists of a long, five-chapter introduction, which outlines and deconstructs that which has gone before, and a brief, one-chapter 'reconstruction' of one period of Indian history. In this sense the book reads like an inverted version of Dumont's *Homo Hierarchicus* (where two chapters of deconstructive introduction are followed by seven chapters of reconstruction, plus some additional matter). Indeed, for the anthropological reader it is intriguing to glimpse the obviously very difficult relationship that Inden has with Dumont: approved of wholeheartedly for dismissing Eliade's Jungian mumbo-jumbo (pp. 124-5), yet criticized indirectly (through a criticism of Madelaine Biarreau) for throwing out the baby of human agency in history with the bathwater of specious evolutionist speculation (p. 126).

Throughout the book, Inden's aim is to deny power to a series of 'essences' that have been held up as determinative of Indian social formations and, instead, to locate agency in the will and action of the Indians themselves. These 'essences', detailed and meticulously picked apart in the four central chapters of the book, are 'caste', 'Hinduism', 'village India' and 'divine' kingship. All of these, at various times and in various combinations, have been held up by Anglo-American scholars as what Inden terms 'substantialized agents' or 'essences', static forces that lie behind and guide the actions of the men (and, presumably, women, though Inden has little to say about this), rendering everyone from the rulers of Indian kingdoms to the members of the village council powerless tools, capable only of expressing these deep and largely irrational forces.

Relying on backing from such intellectual heavyweights as Collingwood and, to a lesser extent, Foucault and Gramsci, Inden's main targets of attack are the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century historians of, and other writers on, India (particularly James Mill and Hegel). These are identified in the first chapter as being the source of hegemonic knowledge of India in Europe (and later, in America), a knowledge that forms the ground-plan of all later investigations of Indian history and society. It was such writers as these who paved the way for seeing a 'dreamy imagination' (p. 3) as the condition of the Indian mind, the antithesis of the rapier-like sharpness of European rationality. This was particularly so when Hinduism was considered, that vast sponge that absorbed all that came in contact with it, which was taken to be essentially feminine in character, and which thus enervated and feminized all who were involved with it. Caste too, the 'body' that carries the Hindu 'mind' of India, was thus an irrational social formation. Of course, for some (utilitarian rationalists such as Mill, for example), this irrationality was to be despised and replaced as soon as possible, while for others (the 'Romantics' as Inden dubs them, such as Sir William Jones,

and later idealists such as Eliade) the 'irrationality' of caste and Hinduism were to be admired for expressing a deep well-spring of ancient human feeling and knowledge, however hopeless this might be for maintaining a viable polity.

Inden's main concern, however, is less with the imperialist and often laughable accounts of 'the Indian mind', than with accounts of the pre-British state(s). To this end, chapters 4 and 5 (on village India and 'divine' kingship), form a necessary prelude to chapter 6, the 'reconstruction' of the history of the Rashtrakutas—an 'imperial formation' as Inden calls it, which laid political claim to much of India between AD 753 and 975. Inden's rereading of inscriptions and grants made by the Rashtrakuta kings suggests that they continually and actively reconstituted their kingdom in both time and space through elaborate rituals of bathing, processions and installation ceremonies. The Rashtrakuta kings were neither oriental despots (one view of divine kings) nor effete pleasure-seekers who deceived themselves into believing that they ruled over vast tracts of land, whereas in fact all Indian villages were self-governing autonomous entities. The polity of the Rashtrakuta empire is best seen, according to Inden, borrowing from Collingwood, as a 'scale of forms', an overlapping of complex agents (persons and aspects of persons that, however temporarily, may act upon the world with some common purpose) ranging from village councils and their headmen up to the Rashtrakuta Chakravartin, the universal ruler. The Chakravartin was not the agent responsible for the conquest and maintenance of his empire, nor were he and all his subjects the instruments of the agency of caste or Hinduism. Rather, he was the apex or centre of a series of concentric rings of complex agents, each dependent upon the other for the exercise of their agency and all dependent upon the Chakravartin and the rituals (actions) of the royal court to sustain and continually refashion the polity.

In a brief summary such as this I have had to leave unrecorded the many subtleties of Inden's book, in particular the painstaking way in which he teases out a variety of Orientalist discourses and illuminates the sometimes fundamental disagreements between earlier scholars as to the nature of India. Quite apart from the main thrust of his argument, Inden also offers many comments and asides of direct interest to anthropologists. His discussion of the bathing rituals of the Rashtrakutas (pp. 233-9) is one such. He criticizes anthropologists who have discussed the 'power' that is supposed to be gained through initiation rituals (here *tejas*, with which the Rashtrakuta king becomes infused through the rites of bathing) as being conceived of as an objective force, akin to electricity. This power can then be used to control the universe, a typical irrationality of the constructed Hindu Indian 'as a person trying to do something he obviously cannot do' (p. 236). Nor, says Inden, does it help much to say that the ritual baths 'purify' as 'almost every rite in Hinduism can be said to purify somebody or something' (ibid.). Rather, Inden would prefer to see the king infused with divine will, a combination of desire and intellect, in short, a 'world-ordering rationality' (p. 237).

There are certainly problems with the book, the most serious of which is that by returning agency to the Indian other, a similar analysis must be pursued for the Orientalists themselves: who or what were the agents in the Anglo-French and US-USSR 'imperial formations' (as Inden dubs them, the latter succeeding the former as formulators of hegemonic knowledge about the Orient), and why did they produce the texts they did with the arguments they did? Certainly, having argued persuasively for the subtle complexity of the Rashtrakutas' actions (who, through their rituals and claims to territory were not, according to Inden, seeking simply to demonstrate 'control' over time and space but were, rather, 'striving, with every political act, to give a better account of the world than had their predecessors' (p. 247)), Inden is careful not to make such reductionist assumptions about the agents of these formations. A second problem for the anthropologist lies in the treatment of anthropology itself. Although the discipline is mentioned along with such others as sociology and art history (e.g., pp. 66, 70) as one of the bearers of the hegemonic discourse about India, there is very little sustained discussion of the discipline, apart from reference to some rather elderly works on village India (Adrian Mayer, Srinivas) and the very circumscribed discussions of Dumont. One suspects that Inden found it in his best interests not to mention more modern works of anthropology (relating both to India and elsewhere, especially New Guinea) precisely because the idea of attributing rational purpose and self-willed agency to the subjects of anthropological investigation—in short, of seeing things in their terms—is now nearly commonplace. If, as he claims, Inden is seeking to displace the mistaken emulation of the natural sciences and is 'committed to building on and extending the aspects of the social sciences and history that have been liberating for people and helping them to act as fuller, more knowledgeable agents' (p. 22) it is sad that he did not investigate further into post-structuralist anthropology. Recent work in African history, which similarly attempts to accord agency to the subjects, is not mentioned at all.

None the less, this is a powerful and important book. It is packed with ideas and information, as well as wit (his comments on the Jungian and 'New Age' appropriation of Hindu mysticism (pp. 123-4) are especially acerbic). Even the potentially dullest and most specialist section, the reconstruction of the Rashtrakuta polity, brings vividly to life the endless and apparently vacuous eulogies of royal inscriptions and grants.

MARCUS BANKS

JULIA LESLIE (ed.), *Roles and Rituals for Hindu Women*, London: Pinter 1991. xviii, 267 pp., References, Index. £27.50.

The essays in this volume examine the historical and contemporary role of women in Hindu rituals, as well as Hindu women's perceptions of religious life and experience. The notion that women are merely passive victims of an oppressive ideology, dominated by men, is strenuously contested. Each of the contributors to the collection demonstrates that women do not simply conform to the model imposed upon them by Hindu men. Far from being quiescent and largely inactive, as women are typically portrayed in Brahmanical literature and often viewed by non-Hindu writers (including non-Hindu feminists), the picture that emerges reveals that women are, and apparently always have been, involved in the creation of their own identity, which they, themselves, positively construct. Yet it may not be assumed that women are opposed to men, or that women have a world-view that is radically different from men's. As Leslie writes, 'it is the small deviations from the norm which may be crucial, perhaps the way the apparently negative is transformed into something positive and powerful' (p. 3).

In order to delineate these so-called 'deviations', as well as to facilitate understanding of them, the volume is divided into four principal parts. The first of these is concerned with 'The Ritual Wife', the second, third and fourth with 'Power in the Home', 'The Ritual of Dance' and 'The Pursuit of Salvation' respectively. These four sections separate, in turn, into two distinct contexts: (1) interpretation of religious rituals encapsulated in texts written and compiled by men, and (2) women's perspectives on religious and ritual behaviour. However, while each of the contributors provides insights into these distinct areas of investigation, Mary McGee's essay is, perhaps, singularly noteworthy, and a useful place to start.

McGee analyses textual descriptions of votive rites (*vratas*) compiled by a male literate élite and compares them with contemporary statements by women. According to the male compilers, these rites enable women to achieve spiritual liberation (*moksa*), as well as promising more immediate, though lesser, worldly rewards. Since these secondary benefits are additional, votive rites are considered to be 'optional' (*kamya*) rather than 'obligatory' (*nitya*). But when McGee explores alternative evaluations, provided by her female Maharashtrian informants, there is a significant shift in emphasis. Of central importance is the belief that votive rites enable women to maintain marital felicity (*saubhagya*), a term which denotes 'good fortune' or 'auspiciousness'. This manifests itself in a woman by virtue of her wifehood. Now, since the term (*saubhagya*) is added to the list of rewards—and because the duties of the devoted wife (her *stridharma*) are directed solely towards the well-being of her husband and household—McGee contends that votive rites are never merely optional for women. Thus it appears that the label (*kamya*) is inadequate, since, for women, performance is invariably synonymous with obligation. Moreover, the quest for spiritual liberation, although an intended object of votive rites, does not seem to be the reason why women observe them.

Because *moksa* is held to be concomitant with marital felicity, it is not the first, but the second of these concerns that brings women within the orbit of the ceremonial framework. This also contrasts with the traditional male view. By placing stress upon 'acquisition' of the supreme goal (together with other inferior rewards), McGee shows that the entire orientation of women's lives towards 'maintenance' of the family is completely ignored. In this respect, the textual compilers fall short of recognizing the motives and intentions of women votaries.

These subtle differences that McGee identifies illustrate clearly that Hindu women may not be viewed in terms of passivity or indolence. And the manner in which women are actively, exegetically and purposefully involved in this complex process of construction is not limited simply to votive rites. As the other contributors forcefully argue, this also applies to sectarian movements, marriage ceremonies, classical and modern dance rituals as well as to female asceticism.

By way of conclusion, it must be pointed out, however, that the volume has one notable weakness: in more than 200 pages the 'nature-culture' controversy is not once addressed. Yet the book's challenge is directly related to important issues raised by this debate. The contention that women are closer to 'nature', while men may, contrastingly, be more easily equated with 'culture', assumes that women are more or less passive and unassertive. In the context of Hindu rituals and religious behaviour, this would be an essentially androcentric view, serving to reinforce the inherently biased model of women that Hindu men and male-authored texts allocate to them. It is unfortunate that the types of problem confronted by proponents of this thesis are never tackled explicitly in *Roles and Rituals for Hindu Women*. Despite this criticism, however, the book deserves a prominent place on the reading lists of anthropologists and Orientalists.

GRAHAM DWYER

JUNE MCDANIEL, *The Madness of the Saints: Ecstatic Religion in Bengal*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press 1989. xi, 286 pp., Appendixes, References, Index, Tables. £45.00/£13.50.

The typical Indian holy man—in the Indian estimation as in the Western stereotype—is calm, ascetic, and in control, capable of feats of endurance or suppleness that ordinary mortals can only wonder at. June McDaniel's book describes a very different type of holy man and woman, important in Bengal, the mad saint. The mad saint may behave like a baby, weep uncontrollably, imagine him or herself to be Krishna's wife Radha, have luxuriant visions, beat and insult would-be devotees, and ignore or invert the etiquette and purity rules of polite society.

One theme of *The Madness of the Saints* deals with the ways in which Bengalis attempt to distinguish between divine madness and ordinary insanity. In fact, in nearly all the case-studies she describes and the biographies she translates the holy person was initially thought to be mad and taken by concerned relatives to doctors, exorcists, and Ayurvedic doctors for treatment. Only when these pronounced it not to be insanity, and when the 'patients' began to acquire disciples, did they begin to be taken as saints. Even then, some families could not accept the apparent madness as *bhāva*, a state of extreme emotion caused by god-intoxication. This concept seems to be shared equally by all Bengalis, and divine madness equally revered, whether they are Vaishnavas (followers of Vishnu, in this case in his form as Krishna), Shaktas (followers of Shakti, Shiva's consort), Muslims, or members of other, syncretic sects.

There is, furthermore, a crucial distinction in Bengal between *bhāva*, a state of intoxication caused by closeness to god, and *bhor*, which is possession by god. McDaniel writes: 'one woman, called a "*bhor* lady" by others, was scandalized when asked about her experiences. "I do not have *bhor*, I have *bhāva*!" she replied proudly. Possession trance (*bhor*) is associated with the poor and low caste, while *bhāva* belongs to several venerable religious traditions. *Bhāva* is more justifiable, a state of divine love or awareness, while possession trance often has practical ends (diagnosing and healing disease, asking the deities for favors) and demonstrates neither love nor awareness' (pp. 229-30).

The Madness of the Saints is, then, full of material that is grist to the anthropological mill, but the anthropological reader has to work hard to extract such culturally and sociologically significant points from the text. The book plunges straight into the subject with no preliminary setting of the scene. No anthropological accounts of Bengal or India are mentioned, not even those produced in Chicago. I. M. Lewis's *Ecstatic Religion* is listed in the references but is not discussed; we have to wait instead, until more than half way through the book, for a quotation from a novel by Anita Desai, to make the point, as McDaniel puts it, that 'religion has been both the way in and the way out for Bengali women' (p. 191).

McDaniel's technique is to translate extensive chunks of Bengali biographies of mad saints, and to summarize the rest, and then to comment briefly on the content. She supplements these written sources with interviews with living mad saints she met in Bengal. It is only in the conclusion that the context really emerges. Such mad saints invert the dominant, scripturally approved version of divine awareness. In the latter, one is supposed to first receive initiation from a guru, then practise ritual and yoga long and hard, gradually attaining glimpses of one's chosen god; glimpses that are to be made more vivid through discipline and control. Mad saints, by contrast, *begin* with dramatic, upsetting, and even bizarre visions of god. Ritual and initiations, if undertaken at all, are done only as a secondary legitimization; direct visions and experience of god are what it is all about. Since such saints are admired, however, and their own scriptural traditions are well established, there arises the secondary problem of how to distinguish

someone who is really a mad saint from someone who is merely imitating how a mad saint is supposed to behave.

In short, *The Madness of the Saints* makes available a mass of fascinating Bengali material. It is particularly good that McDaniel sets side by side all the different competing traditions of Bengali religion and shows what they share and how they differ. But her phenomenological, religious-studies perspective means that comparisons are made with Christianity, with European folk-tales, and with Freudianism, but only in passing and not very satisfyingly with other Indian regional traditions. There is no discussion of how these mad saints appear to laity who are not devotees, and even the devotees themselves are fairly shadowy. There is no attempt to relate the material to anthropological discussions of spirit-possession and renunciation in Hinduism.

DAVID N. GELLNER

JOHN EADE and MICHAEL J. SALLNOW (eds.), *Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage*, London and New York: Routledge 1991. xii, 153 pp., Index, Figures. £10.99.

It was Victor Turner who put the topic of pilgrimage on anthropologists' list of contents. Although he got it so wrong, he published so much that others felt obliged to point out his errors. These revisionists have done their job so well that, these days, dumping on Turner has become *passé*. Of course, if Turner and his critics had bothered to read Robert Hertz's long paper of 1914 on pilgrimage in southeast France, they would have found most of their points and counterpoints already well set out in his admirably clear ethnographic essay. It is, therefore, deeply disappointing that none of the contributors to this collection cites this apparently forgotten paper.

Instead of crabbing *communitas*, today's anthropologists of pilgrimage see the phenomenon as a varied, contested domain that—like any other comparative concept—eludes easy definition. In so far as they can contain the topic, they view pilgrimage both as a field of social relations and as a realm of competing discourses. Thus a place does not become a shrine because of some intrinsic religious character it supposedly manifests, but because it can accommodate a diversity of meanings and practices. And a place becomes a major shrine, one of universalistic import, if it can bear the weight of interpretation applied by a multiplicity of religious discourses. A site like Lourdes, for instance, becomes famous and much visited because so many different types of clients can there find (or at least seek) what they desire. In other words, shrines are *inscribed* upon the landscape, and they are never definitively inscribed.

The contributors bring out the plurality of pilgrimage in a sophisticated, post-Turnerian manner. Bowman, focusing on Jerusalem, contrasts the discourses of Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant pilgrimage to this sacred site. McKeivitt looks at the way the villagers at one pilgrimage site feel its control has been wrested from them, and how its controllers now view them as almost diabolic characters who fail to live up to the Christian ideals that the site is meant to embody. Instead of contrasting the particular approaches of three different churches, Dahlberg compares the religious style of three different Catholic pilgrimages to Lourdes: one organized by an archdiocese, one for handicapped children, and one commercial venture. Eade, also at Lourdes, describes the tensions between collective discipline and freedom of expression, between lay helpers and pilgrims who wish to make the most of their visit. Stirrat shows how the new shrines that have been created in Sri Lanka in recent decades are defined less by place than by person, i.e. 'holy men' imbued with the power of the divine. Sallnow demonstrates the internally contradictory nature of Andean Christianity and the way locals use pilgrimage to try to reclaim, in a neo-colonial manner, their compromised cultural identity.

In sum, these carefully analysed papers give an accurate idea of the present state and theoretical richness of contemporary pilgrimage studies. No one writing on the anthropology of Christian pilgrimage can afford to ignore it.

JEREMY MACCLANCY

MALCOLM BULL and KEITH LOCKHART, *Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-day Adventism and the American Dream*, New York etc.: Harper & Row 1989. xi, 311 pp., Index, Tables, Figures. No price given.

The Seventh-day Adventist (SDAs) emerged from the 'Great Disappointment' of 22 October 1884: the day that the followers of William Miller, a preacher from upstate New York, expected to see the Second Coming. A small band of the disappointed found a way of coming to terms with their mistaken prediction by believing that on that day God had begun the process of separating the salvational sheep from the goats, which would be completed at some unspecified time in the future. To that belief they added the requirement to keep Saturday rather than Sunday as the sabbath. Inspired by the writings of Ellen White—interesting that American fringe Protestantism should have produced so many women leaders; Mary Baker Eddy of Christian Science and Aimee Semple McPherson of the Four Square Gospel are further examples—the group grew to gradually become not only a denomination but an enclosed world. Ellen White's vision of the rightness of the health reform movement combined with the energy of John Harvey Kellogg (yes, that Kellogg!) to make the SDAs pioneers of nursing training, dietary improvement and medical missionary work.

From the first, the SDAs were distanced from the mainstream of American culture by their rejection of the American Dream of material fulfilment in this life in favour of the millennium. They were further made strangers in their own land by their Saturday sabbath, which prevented them from becoming involved in the evangelical and fundamentalist crusades of the late nineteenth century. The consequence of this double isolation was a turning inward and the creation of a variety of social institutions to complement their specifically religious institutions.

An interesting theme of Bull and Lockhart's book is the way in which SDA fund-raising (members typically give far more than a tenth of their income) and spending bind members into their alternative world. The vast bulk of SDA money is spend on SDA institutions (and even some of their best hospitals are run at a loss) that employ largely SDA members. Although the authors do not put it so crudely, there is a strong incentive for SDA members to stay in the Church to get back what they have put in. However, many do not stay. In an ironic process well documented by Bryan R. Wilson, the Church, for all its unhappiness with the American Dream, has been all too successful in helping its members attain worldly success. Upward social mobility was provided, not only by inculcating such appropriate values as asceticism and self-discipline (as did other US conservative Protestant denominations) but also by creating a 'fast track' for accelerated mobility. By creating its own institutions, it provided a protected demand for professionals and thus created an unusually large number of training and career opportunities for Adventists.

Although now very large (with about five million members) and successful in recruiting in many parts of the Third World, the SDAs remain something of a mystery, provoking very different but often strong reactions. For those who are interested in learning about SDA history, theology, ecclesiology and mores, this book will be an excellent source. The exposition is clear and well illustrated from the movement's publications; the commentary is sensible and occasionally witty. If there is one weakness in this authoritative account, it is its dependence on official published sources. We are told a great deal about what Ellen White thought about fiction, dancing and the opera (she was 'agin 'em'), but the sociologist and the anthropologist will want to know the extent to which such teachings informed the lives of early Adventists. There is also a lack of contemporary ethnographic material. Despite its length, the book gives little insight into the 'everyday life world' of an Adventist. Do they still avoid the cultural products of the secular mass media? Do they still not read novels? How do they decorate their houses? How do they vote? Where did they stand on the Moral Majority? We are left to guess, but Bull and Lockhart seem to be guiding us firmly to the conclusion that, for all the rhetoric, Adventists are no longer very distinctive.

STEVE BRUCE

PETER G. FORSTER, *T. Cullen Young: Missionary and Anthropologist*, Hull: Hull University Press 1989. xv, 251 pp., Index. £7.95.

Much interest is now being shown by anthropologists in the relations between anthropology and the work of missionaries. In this many-sided affair, books and articles are emerging that show the help given to anthropology by missionaries, especially up until the Second World War. Attention is often focused on Roman Catholic contributions (Pater Schmidt and his school), on those of Anglicans (Denys Shropshire) and of continental Protestants (Leenhardt). The work of Scottish Protestants is rarely represented. For this reason, Peter Forster's study of T. Cullen Young (1880–1955) is to be welcomed.

Influenced by the life and work of David Livingstone (1813–73), himself a Scot and virtually self-taught, Cullen Young went to northern Nyasaland (now Malawi) in 1904 as one of twelve missionaries sent out by the United Free Church Assembly. He was an accountant by training and also received a limited theological education. Not surprisingly, his duties in and around Livingstonia comprised supervising the accounts and teaching in and inspecting schools. He was ordained in 1914 whilst on leave in Scotland. During the military push into Tanganyika he organized interpreters. When the war was over he began to write primarily in the areas of language and history, and, later, anthropology. Like so many missionaries, he felt forced to leave his work for personal reasons. For him these were the education of his children and his wife's mental illness. The Youngs left Africa in 1931, never to return. He then worked in London and became the General Secretary of what was to become the United Society for Christian Literature. He eventually died of cancer in Scotland in 1955. He remained to the end a minister in the church but his views became less evangelical. Although he held that there existed mysterious forces beyond scientific explanation, he recognized the challenge of secular humanism and was eventually attracted to Quakerism. He believed that the justification for mission work was functional: that Christianity rather than paganism was better suited to modern Africa.

Cullen Young became interested in anthropology because he saw that whereas India had a literate civilization, in Africa only 'human documents' were available; therefore one had to learn from the people as they were. He saw the necessity of anthropological studies for understanding the 'cruel' elements of the social life of the local people, such as the killing of children without a mother and the treatment of twins. He was totally opposed to such 'barbaric' acts, but he also saw that anthropology could show the missionary which components of culture could be utilized for his own purposes. He was, of course, a self-taught anthropologist, but when he started work in Africa professional anthropology with fieldwork experience was unknown.

As he was without a great interest in theory it might be more accurate to call him an ethnographer. He concerned himself with two adjacent areas that are occupied today by the patrilineal Ngoni/Tumbuka people in the north of Malawi and the matrilineal Chewa in the central region. He was not the first missionary

to make ethnographic studies, but he went further than others and concentrated particularly on the Tumbuka. He wrote about their religious beliefs, taboos (a taboo, for him, was a combination of common sense and sympathetic magic), the *ng'anga* (traditional doctor), proverbs, folk-tales, and so forth. He contributed reviews and articles to *Africa*, *Man* and the *JRAI*, but perhaps his most useful contribution was *Notes of the Customs and Folklore of the Tumbuka-Kamanga Peoples*, which appeared in 1931. He attempted, perhaps not very successfully, to develop the notion of a 'good village'. As a sensitive observer, he was opposed to stereotyping Africans. His work was academically acknowledged in 1950 when Ralph Piddington of Edinburgh University was instrumental in having him awarded an honorary M.A.

Forster devotes a long chapter to Cullen Young's achievements as a historian of the region. His concern was with the changes of fortune of the peoples of northern Malawi since the arrival of Europeans. He corrected previous attempts at history, not without criticism, and utilized verbal accounts from the students he taught of what had happened in the past. He was especially concerned with the Ngoni conquest of Tumbuka. Forster holds that Cullen Young's most influential contribution to scholarship was in the realm of history.

There are other chapters on education and literary matters, and finally one on political issues. Here should be noted Cullen Young's relation to, and influence on, Hastings Banda when he was resident in England. Banda's initial experience of mission education was in Livingstonia where Cullen Young was based.

Peter Forster, trained by Max Gluckman, has visited Malawi several times and presents a clearly written, sympathetic and comprehensive intellectual biography of a little-known figure: a Protestant missionary who produced valuable ethnographic and historical material for scholars interested in Africans living on the west side of Lake Malawi. The extensive bibliographies are also useful. And the book is remarkably cheap.

W. S. F. PICKERING

MARGARET JOLLY and MARTHA MACINTYRE (eds.), *Family and Gender in the Pacific: Domestic Contradictions and the Colonial Impact*, Cambridge etc.: Cambridge University Press 1989. xiii, 258 pp., Bibliography, Index. £27.50.

This volume is composed mostly of papers originally presented at a conference held in Canberra in December 1983, as part of the workshop on gender relations in the south-west Pacific. The title of the conference was 'Christianity, Colonialism and the Family in the Pacific', and although it is true that many of the papers go beyond the brief immediately suggested by the conference title, it seems rather

puzzling that neither 'Christian' nor 'Missionaries' appears in the title of the volume, as this would, I suggest, give a better indication of the material on offer.

The contributors make an effort to locate missionary activity within the wider colonial context, and missionaries are given an especial prominence throughout many of the book's twelve essays. The volume represents an exemplary collaboration between historians and anthropologists casting their nets over a wide area from Hawaii to Australia. The breadth and scope of the material are impressive, and the manner of presentation is often entertaining and ironic. This is evident, for example, in Michael Young's evenhanded assessment, in 'Suffer the Children', of Wesleyan efforts to 'rescue' D'Entrecasteaux children from the influence of home and family, and in Roger Keesing's 'Sins of a Mission', which attempts to assess the impact of Christianity in Melanesia in an approach that he argues is both synchronic and direct as well as diachronic and indirect, employing as sources both oral traditions and documentary evidence.

In true postmodernist style the contributors perceive their task as one of deconstructing the colonial discourse, as well as other discourses that have been profoundly colonial in style. The reader is led to examine the power relations between colonialists, missionaries and indigenous people, and between the sexes, as the authors explore Christianity along dimensions that are at once 'religious', 'political' and 'economic'. When missionaries arrived in the region they brought with them their own models of domesticity and the family as well as assumptions about the place of women within the total scheme of things. Comparisons with events in Africa and elsewhere leap continually to mind.

Patricia Grimshaw details the attempts of New England missionary wives to transform the lives of Hawaiian women, ironically undermining some of those very aspects of Hawaiian culture on which Hawaiian women could build some measure of autonomy. Caroline Ralston outlines changes in the lives of 'ordinary women' in early post-contact Hawaii, while Nicholas Thomas explores domestic structures and polyandry in the Marquesas Islands. The reader is brought repeatedly to a greater appreciation of the intimacies of domestic life and of relations between men and women, major aspects of the total picture that were written out of former analyses and found no place in colonial records. The now familiar theme of invisible women runs through many of the papers, strikingly so in Donald Denoon's discussion of medical care and gender in Papua New Guinea and in Annette Hamilton's description of relations between Australian male settlers and their Aboriginal female companions. Mervyn Meggitt offers a rather depressing analysis of the position of women in contemporary Central Enga society as he outlines the complex ways in which, as far as men's power to coerce women and define their restricted role is concerned, *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*.

Questions concerning the organization of space in the domestic and ritual spheres are explored by Martha MacIntyre, who details and discusses the reasons for the demise of Tubetube architecture, and by Margaret Jolly, who demonstrates how Christian sacred spaces in South Pentecost, Vanuatu, remain as segregated and as under male control as the older pre-Christian spaces were. Jeffrey Clark's

discussion of Christianity and social organization among Takuru Wiru sensitively portrays the dialectic that is set up within the encounter between different cosmologies, demonstrating that no simple notions of 'impact' or 'change' can adequately reflect the way in which Christianity has become integrated, for the time being at least, into a cosmology that reinforces male dominance and devalues women.

As can be seen, the range of these contributions is enormous, though, perhaps inevitably at times, depth of discussion is sacrificed. For example, there is no sustained exploration of the concept of 'conversion' and few attempts to pin down what actually goes on when an individual converts. Nor are there explorations of such matters as the notion of personhood, practices surrounding the body and issues of language, all of which, one suspects, are also germane. But this is probably to demand too much.

In their introduction, Jolly and MacIntyre state their major aim as one in which 'grand epistemological questions', such as the production and continuance of such notions as nature and culture and domestic and public, are set within 'the more precise confines of historical and cultural particulars'(p. 15). In this, they have certainly succeeded.

ANTHONY SIMPSON

JAMES L. WATSON and EVELYN S. RAWSKI (eds.), *Death Ritual in Late Imperial and Modern China* [Studies on China 8], Berkeley etc.: University of California Press 1988. xv, 316 pp., Glossary-Index, Plates. \$40.00.

This book represents the proceedings of a conference on 'Ritual and the Social Significance of Death in Chinese Society' held in Oracle, Arizona, in January 1985. It has been prepared as carefully as were the seven previous volumes in the series 'Studies on China' that have appeared since 1982 under the sponsorship of the Joint Committee on Chinese Studies of the American Council of Learned Societies and the Social Science Research Council. The twelve articles are clearly structured, correlated with one another, and accompanied by detailed references and a Glossary-Index of Chinese characters to facilitate the search for particular subjects. The emphasis is on China since the fifteenth century, with a clear bias towards modern China. The Preface calls this the 'strategem of "beginning at the end"', which reflects the fact that anthropological research on the country has so far concentrated mostly on modern China. None the less, the theme of death ritual in early Chinese history appears frequently in the book.

Three of the original conference contributions, which were to be published elsewhere, are omitted. Two of these ('O Soul, Come Back! The Ritual of *fu* ("Recall") and Conceptions of the Afterlife in Pre-Buddhist China' by Yü Ying-

shih and 'Dead but Not Gone: Cultural Implications of Mortuary Practices in Neolithic and Early Bronze Age China' by David Keightley) would have provided a link with earlier periods of Chinese death ritual, with definite benefit for the understanding of modern Chinese death ritual, but none the less the book offers much valuable material on Chinese mortuary practices in general.

The authors actually represented consist of six anthropologists, three historians and one sociologist. The two introductory articles, 'The Structure of Performance' by James Watson and 'A Historian's Approach to Chinese Death Ritual' by Evelyn Rawski, show the varying approaches of different scientific disciplines to the treatment of Chinese death ritual. The anthropologist Watson starts from the principle that despite local and social variation, Chinese funerary ritual has a common basic structure. In late imperial times death ritual was more or less uniform in Chinese society. Watson writes, 'preoccupation with performance—rather than belief—made it possible for imperial authorities, local elites, and ordinary peasants to agree on the proper form for the conduct of funerals' (p. 18). 'By enforcing orthopraxy (correct practice) rather than orthodoxy (correct belief) state officials made it possible to incorporate people from many different ethnic and regional backgrounds, with varying beliefs and attitudes, into an overarching social system we now call China' (p. 104). With the eyes of a historian, Rawski discusses in detail Watson's theme of the primacy of performance over belief and concludes: 'Historians would thus argue that the primary agents of cultural integration cited by Watson—the state, officials, and local elites—did intend to promote orthodoxy through orthopraxy' (p. 28). Such differences in approach are discussed by the other authors in the book.

The second part of the volume is also valuable for its comprehensive treatment of the many aspects of Chinese death ritual. The basic research material varies, according to author, from local histories to academic literature and from information from newspapers and travel reports to fieldwork data, the latter having a particularly important part to play. Susan Naquin describes and analyses information on funerary practices from northern Chinese local histories published between 1870 and 1940. Stuart E. Thompson explores the symbolism of food, especially of rice and pork, in Chinese death ritual. James Watson deals with the social background and ritual roles of priests, musicians, corpse-handlers and the like in Chinese mortuary practices. Elizabeth L. Johnson describes and interprets the content, ritual and social significance of lamenting with regard to Hakka women's roles in death ritual and in Chinese society. Emily Martin is concerned specifically with the views of Chinese women on marriage, which involves their final separation from their natal home and represents for them a sort of death as well as the continuation of life. Myron L. Cohen discusses the 'social interpretation of death with particular reference to the emphasis or de-emphasis of salvation in different popular religious contexts'. Rubie Watson deals with the possible political implications of ancestral grave worship in south-eastern China. Evelyn Rawski shows how, in the Ming and Qing periods, imperial death ritual practice structurally resembled commoners' practice, though it also had a special

significance through its embeddedness in state religion. In 'Mao's Remains', Frederic Wakeman compares mortuary observances at Mao Tse-tung's and Chiang Kai-shek's funerals. Finally, Martin K. Whyte discusses the problem of continuity and discontinuity between traditional Chinese death rites and ideological and practical attitudes towards mortuary rites in the People's Republic.

The volume is heavily biased towards southern China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, north China only being dealt with, and then only historically, by Naquin and Rawski. It is to be hoped that future research on death ritual in China may be extended into this area too. It would also be desirable to take account of other kinds of material, especially literature (see the third omitted contribution, by Anthony Yu, 'Rest, Rest, Perturbed Spirit! Ghosts in Traditional Chinese Prose Fiction', which has, however, appeared in the *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* (1987)), but also oral literature, which until now has not been explored sufficiently in connection with death.

MAREILE FLITSCH

JONATHAN HAAS (ed), *The Anthropology of War*, Cambridge etc.: Cambridge University Press 1990. xiv, 211 pp., References, Index, Figures. £30.00/\$49.50.

This volume comprises, in edited form, papers presented at an advanced seminar held at the School of American Research. Broadly, the purpose of the seminar was to relate recent research about warfare in pre-state societies to a general anthropology of war, the latter being interpreted by the conference chairman to include warfare among nation states. Specifically, the contributors sought to understand the causation of war and peace in pre-state societies as well as the effects of war on their evolution. The result is a collection of informative essays that are at once diverse in geography and history and uniform in interest and scholarship.

The authors' theoretical positions and perspectives are diverse also. Some of the perspectives concern different but complementary approaches to the study of war, whereas others relate to competing theoretical stances. About the former, basic distinctions are drawn between the origins of war, its maintenance as a going concern once begun, and the effects of war upon the societies involved. Since some tribal societies are peaceful, a further problem concerning the maintenance of war is defined. Some papers address the problem of how war is maintained in some societies while peace is maintained in others. Thomas Gibson compares war and violence in three groups of cultivators in a regional economy in Southeast Asia. One group, the Buid, were peaceful whereas the others were not. The physical and social ecology was similar for all groups and could not, therefore, explain the difference between them. Gibson argues that Buid peace persists through a value consensus where violence, aggression and competition are

negatively defined and sanctioned. When raided by others, the Buid did not counter raid, for neither bravery nor courage was esteemed by them; instead, flight was the customary and proper mode of response. Young Buid males, it seems, established their masculinity by making love not war. Other papers describe the peaceful Semai of Malaysia and Xinguano of Brazil, and it seems that the absence of war in all the above cultures relates to anti-violent value systems and low levels of stratification.

Three general factors tending to maintain war are distinguished: the loss of ingroup members, especially kin, creates irrational revenge needs, which once assuaged produce further like needs in the foe; secondly, where one group is attacked by another, it has a rational need to counter-attack, otherwise it might be eliminated—thus, once started, war tends inherently to persist; finally, the existence of a group with material and ideal interests in war, such as a warrior class. Robert Carneiro examines chieftain-level warfare in Fiji and Colombia, and shows the initial causes of war, the further causes produced by war that then sustain it, and the effects of war upon culture. The origin of war was chieftain rivalry, but its ensuing slaughter generated revenge needs among antagonists. These motives then acted independently to maintain wars of escalating hatred and ferocity, which occasioned each side to eat its prisoners, to inflict upon them the ultimate outrage. Although vengeance was its origin, cannibalism in time became gastronomic, as people grew fond of cooked human flesh. Concerning the effects of cannibalism, it produced not only new culinary customs, but also additional motives for war, since persons now needed prisoners of war in order to eat them.

The various authors favour different models of causation including the materialist/ecological, the biocultural and the historical. The materialist model relates war to competition for such resources as land and trade goods. According to this model, warriors may or may not be motivated by conscious desires for resources, but where not, as in honorific war, their victories might still improve the terms of trade. In such a case, warfare would relate, in an unintended but important way, to the material basis of culture. In a fascinating paper, Jonathan Haas argues that land and water scarcity led Indian bands in Arizona to concentrate on increasing food yields, and this cooperation produced tribalization at the local level. In contrast, scarcity created war among the newly formed tribes at the wider regional level. In a persuasive essay, Clayton Robarchek argues that material and biocultural models explain war as occurring deterministically in response to objective material and biological conditions. He describes a conflict over scarce resources among the Semai of Malaya that did not lead to war, but produced instead a compromise in shared values and institutions.

It seems to me that while a general anthropology of war must address all three problems identified above, both behavioural science and history incline to focus upon the causes and effects of war and neglect the problems of its maintenance. Research into modern war has revealed that the persistence of violent exchanges among armed adversaries is problematical. Wars can fall apart, and sometimes they do. Some of this research is cited by Clark McCauley, but other studies, such

as Roger Little's classic ethnography of defensive values in a platoon of the US Army in the Korean war, relevant to the issue of maintenance are not. The US platoon's response to battle was a spontaneously evolved consensus to avoid attacking the enemy, a consensus sustained by sanctions. Subsequent research suggests that defensive values are endemic in modern warfare and, further, that small fighting groups vary greatly in their disposition to attack. Battle confrontations differ, therefore, according to the antagonists' attitudes towards violence: first, where both are inclined to attack; secondly, where one is, but the other is not; and finally, where both are not. For instance, in World War I, defensively minded soldiers commonly negotiated tacit and informal truces in the trenches, and these persisted from the beginning to the end of the war, on both Western and Eastern fronts, and upon all others save Gallipoli. A *de jure* state of war existed, yet a *de facto* peace prevailed. As in tribal war, however, revenge tended to maintain war, for the ties of kin and comrades-in-arms are intense and, as killing occurs, produce revenge needs.

It would have been interesting and possibly useful if the seminar and this book had compared material from the study of modern warfare with that from tribal societies in the discussion of maintenance of both war and peace.

TONY ASHWORTH

COMMENT

Jenness and Malinowski: Fieldwork and Photographs

I should like to add to the discussion presented by Terry Wright in his recent essay in *JASO* (Wright 1991). Before doing so, however, it is worth remarking how the historical and visual interpretation of photographs, in its full complexity and fluidity, is at last finding a respectable place in anthropology.

Wright generously acknowledges both my comments on an early draft of his essay and the exhibition of Jenness's photographs that I have curated recently at the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford. It is unfortunate that Wright's essay was so long through the press, for new work, in connection with the exhibition in particular and with the history of anthropology and photography in general, suggests not only a somewhat different interpretation of the material than that he presents but also has substantial bearing on our understanding of the broader concerns of pre-cinematic visual anthropology.

I could go on at length about both Jenness and Malinowski as photographers, but my main concern here is with the former. While I agree with much of the detail of Wright's contextualization, I question the construction built upon it and the way in which it is used as a mechanism for polarizing the 'old' and the 'new' anthropologies of the beginning of this century. No one would be foolish enough to claim that Jenness was as fine an ethnographer or as visionary an anthropologist as Malinowski, but a different interpretative strategy would perhaps place him on a continuum of developing anthropological method, which underwent a brilliant crystallization with Malinowski. After all, to travel to Paris, as Jenness did, to meet members of the *Année Sociologique* (Richling 1989: 75) and to elect, in 1911, to do what amounted to individual fieldwork of a year's duration (albeit based at a mission station) does not suggest a man unaware of the changing shape of anthropology. Rather, Jenness's work should perhaps be seen as significant in exemplifying the hiatus in anthropological method between the collapsing evolutionary paradigm and the evolving sociological approach. As Stocking has pointed out (1983: 83-4), this period saw a flurry of intensive survey fieldwork that in many ways formed the basis of the British field tradition.

This contextual reorientation suggests a very different reading of Jenness's photographic work. It seems to me that the crucial contextualizing link here is one that Wright overlooks, that is, the Cambridge Torres Straits expedition of 1898. Marett certainly alluded to it when raising funds for Jenness's expedition (Oxford University Archives: UDC/C/2/4.f.6), and Jenness received advice from members

of it, especially Haddon, Rivers and Seligman, as he made his preparations (ibid.: ff. 55-7). Indeed, Haddon's prescriptions for field photography, which drew on his experience in the Torres Straits, were published in the 1899 edition of *Notes and Queries* (BAAS 1899) that, as Wright points out, Jenness had with him in the field.

Although his methodological approach was more limited than that of the Torres Straits expedition, the latter's influence on Jenness comes across strongly in the photographs. Jenness was attempting to mirror photographically what he hoped would be a systematic survey. This is borne out in both the subject-matter and the style of the photographs. They encompass physical anthropology, social structure, ritual, technology and art; some more successfully than others. The camera does not impose a structure on the subject (Wright 1991: 56) in any overt way; rather, it is the unobtrusive 'snap-shot' style that is striking and significant. It is a gentle, 'unmediated' record of everyday life: the subjects are rarely posed in interventionist terms (see Bateson and Mead 1942: 49-50). On the whole, subjects are relaxed, unconcerned about the camera, suggesting an immediacy, even intimacy on occasion, rather than, as Wright argues, the photographer's physical and cultural distance. For example, there are close-up photographs of funeral ritual, of women making pottery and of people gardening, suggesting a considerable degree of access. There is sometimes a suggestion of the subjects' bewilderment, but seldom the tension of intrusion. Within the limited framework of the fieldwork of the time, Jenness's photographs stand up well. Further, Jenness's photographic account is not a vision of ethnographic purity, but one that acknowledges the operation of historical processes and encounters: for example, the activities of the mission station at Bwaidoga and Jenness and Ballantyne's feeding of starving women and children.

Three of the four Jenness photographs reproduced in Wright's essay (Figs. 1, 2 and 3) cannot be claimed to be representative of his photography, indeed they were not even taken on the northern D'Entrecasteaux Islands; the fourth (Fig. 9) is barely more representative. Certainly, 'anthropometric' photography was one aspect of Jenness's overall agenda, but it is the *only* aspect that fits the polarized model of an anthropological dead-end. The published volume, *The Northern D'Entrecasteaux* (Jenness and Ballantyne 1920) is, indeed, devoid of sociological interest and provides a dispirited record of unsuccessful fieldwork. Perhaps, in this instance, image rather than text should be seen as the lasting legacy of the fieldwork.

I shall not comment at length on Malinowski's photography, for the reinterpretation of Jenness's material and its significance has been my primary concern. However, I should like to make two related observations that might go towards a reorientation of what I should argue is an over-polarized interpretation of Malinowski's photography. Even allowing for very different fieldwork circumstances and anthropological vision, both Jenness and Malinowski used photography in broadly similar ways, in that for both of them photography remained a product of, rather than a part of, the process of fieldwork (see Spindler and Spindler 1967:

x-xii). As Wright points out, Malinowski's diaries are full of references to photography. He *was* interested (though he later denies it (1935: 461)), and the results are good, both technically and ethnographically. Nevertheless, one cannot necessarily equate photographic activity with its being integral to field enquiry. There are hints in the *Diary* that photography was sometimes something of a displacement activity (see, for example, Malinowski 1967: 145, 163, 274, 276), and such a reading is supported by Malinowski's own retrospective assessment of his field method. Thus alerted, we may begin to see patterns emerging in his photographic corpus. Perhaps Malinowski should have the last word here:

One capital blot on my field-work must be noted; I mean the photographs...I treated photography as a secondary occupation and a somewhat unimportant way of collecting evidence. This was a serious mistake. In writing up my material on gardens I find that the control of my fieldnotes by means of photographs has led me to reformulate my statements on innumerable points...I have committed one or two deadly sins against method of field-work. In particular, I went by the principle of, roughly speaking, picturesqueness and accessibility. Whenever something important was going to happen, I had my camera with me. If the picture looked nice in the camera and fitted well, I snapped it...I put photography on the same level as the collecting of curios—almost as an accessory relaxation of field-work. (1935: 461)

ELIZABETH EDWARDS

I was very interested to read Elizabeth Edwards' comment concerning my essay. I agree with her initial point that scholarship in the area of ethnographic photography has expanded dramatically over the last five years, but would question her interpretation of the photographs in question and her reading of my essay. For example, I think it unfortunate that she collapses my argument into the sort of polarization I had aimed at the outset to avoid. However, Edwards rightly points out that Jenness should have been aware of the wider theoretical debates of his period, though whenever he committed pen to paper (or, in my view, subject to camera) there is little evidence that he was. Nevertheless, there remains a marked difference in the photographic work of Jenness and Malinowski that reflects their overall anthropological standpoints—different, but not exactly polarized. The essay aimed to address some of the factors that may have accounted for this difference.

I agree with Edwards that I should perhaps have placed Jenness's photography in the context of the Torres Straits expedition. But in doing so, my argument would have been reinforced: the photographs resulting from this expedition are accomplished in their use of the available photographic technology and reflect clearly the prevailing anthropological theories. Thirteen years later, Jenness was producing images that are not only less enquiring anthropologically than those

produced by the Torres Straits expedition, but less so than many of the 'snap-shot' images taken by travellers and missionaries of his period. (As historical documents, however, they have accrued a unique value, demonstrated both by Michael Young's recent showing of Jenness's photographs to their subjects' descendants and by the exhibition of Jenness's work at the Pitt Rivers Museum.)

The Samarai anthropometric photographs (taken after his Paris trip!) were included in my essay as examples of Jenness's formative approach to fieldwork, upon which he expanded in his writing. As soon as he arrived at Goodenough, he subjected some additional sixty people to his anthropometric work. I believe, therefore, that the Samarai images remain indicative of his photographic starting-point and demonstrate clearly his initial regard for his subjects.

Finally, whether or not Malinowski found photography as 'something of a displacement activity' has little relevance: his preoccupation with photography remains, and further proof of his enquiring and accomplished use of the medium is evident in the images themselves—as my essay aimed to show. In addition, Malinowski's first fieldwork photographs from Mailu, to which I have recently had my attention drawn by Michael Young, would seem to support my thesis. They are as 'posed and stilted' as Jenness's are dull and uninspired: they too suggest distance from his subjects. In Mailu, Malinowski did not learn the native language and lived, like Jenness, in the missionaries' house. In my view, as marked a change as was to occur in Malinowski's photography, occurred later in Jenness's anthropological career in his Arctic photography, where he too (if, in this context, the metaphor is appropriate) 'stepped off the verandah'.

TERENCE WRIGHT

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