

## BOOK REVIEWS

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PAUL STOLLER, *The Cinematic Griot: The Ethnography of Jean Rouch*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press 1992. xvii, 266 pp., Bibliography, Index, Maps, Photographs. £31.95/£13.50/\$45.95/\$19.50.

The life and work of Jean Rouch, the French ethnographer and film-maker, are portrayed here in an intellectual biography. The author, Paul Stoller, is an anthropologist who has worked among the Songhay of West Africa, whose lives have also been the subject of numerous works by Rouch over many years. The relationship between these two ethnographers is just as fascinating as the relationship that each has developed individually with the Songhay. Stoller dubs Rouch 'the cinematic griot' with respect to his corpus of ethnographic film. The term 'griot' was coined by early French writers on West Africa and is thought to derive from the Mande word (or from one of its dialects) denoting a specialized praise-singer, a custodian of tradition, a bard who revels in the mastery of language and the power of speech. In Stoller's view, Rouch has become a griot or praise-singer of the Songhay, since he has frequently shown his own films in the villages and cities of Niger. Thus he is portrayed as one who represents the Songhay past, their traditions and rituals (many of them now defunct), as well as those persons now long dead who are reanimated, coming to life on the silver screens set up in village squares or local cinemas. In Stoller's words, Rouch has, as a griot, 'fulfilled his greatest responsibility: to pass on his knowledge to the next generation' (p. xvi). The relationship between Rouch-the-griot and his audience is not, however, always easy, for cinematic representation is a contested issue in Niger: some claim that his images reinforce stereotypes of the 'primitive African', while others are grateful for the experience of reliving the memories of deceased relatives. Stoller's point is that, whatever their reaction, the Songhay are brought into a relation with their past.

The picture of Rouch as griot is complicated on many fronts. Stoller himself is the 'griot's griot' (p. 104), singing, throughout the text, the praises of Rouch's ethnographic and cinematic work, hailing the brave deeds of his own anthropological ancestor (Stoller is 'son of Rouch' in Songhay classification). An account of the intricate relationship between these two ethnographers of different generations cannot be developed in this review (see my 'Reflections of Rouch: Images in the Hall of Mirrors', in a forthcoming issue of the *Journal of Religion in Africa* for an account of the 'crisis of representation' in both authors' writings). The present book, it can be simply noted, complements our view of that relationship, in which Stoller is now cast in a griot's role—a position of privilege in which it is not unknown for the singer himself to portray his own deeds alongside those of his honoured subject.

The picture of Rouch as griot is further complicated by what one gleans from Rouch's writing on how the Songhay have viewed his own participation in their lives. Rather than a griot, he is seen as a man of power, one who has absorbed and has been absorbed by the mysteries of Songhay spiritual life. The person of Rouch as observer and participant, as ethnographer and film-maker, has been assimilated into Songhay

categories of thought such that—far from being a griot—he becomes one possessed of spirit when filming possession trances (he enters a *ciné-transe*), or one who possesses the power of sorcery to devour with his camera people's 'doubles', which are then transformed and projected on to a screen at a later date. He becomes the *mangeur* and later the *montreur de reflets*; see his *La Religion et la magie Songhay* (Paris, 1989, pp. 348–9).

But let us return to the present book, for the representation of Rouch is only one part of a larger project. The central concern is to integrate and interpret the often disparate images of Rouch-the-ethnographer and Rouch-the-film-maker. Rouch's work has been frequently misunderstood by one camp (film critics) or the other (anthropologists). Through an examination of his work in both domains and a review of the intellectual influences that informed his ethnography and film, Stoller argues that there is a continuity and mutually reinforcing relationship between them. 'This book', Stoller states, 'is an attempt to write an anthropological analysis of Rouch's work' (p. 194).

The key connection between film and text in Rouch's corpus is participation: participatory cinema and shared or participatory anthropology (*anthropologie partagée*). Both are developed through an active engagement with the concerns of Rouch's 'subjects'; one of the implications of this method is that the familiar distinction between object and subject becomes blurred: the observer becomes subject, and subjects create their own objects for investigation. Film and text are not simply complementary but related intimately, such that 'the making of...film stimulated historical and sociological inquiry, and the results of that inquiry further informed the film' (p. 96). Not only is a dynamic established (film provokes questions that provide new data that stimulate new films), but the two forms of representation engage our attention in different ways—albeit for a similar purpose. Ethnography that is often reported in a 'flat', 'terse', journalistic style—see, for example, Rouch's *La Religion et la magie Songhay*—is 'shocked into life' in film, with the overall result that we are challenged on two fronts simultaneously, by the scientifically unthinkable and by the philosophically untenable. The combined effect of text and film in disrupting our categories of Western knowledge lies at the heart of the often implicit theoretical intentions that underlie Rouch's work.

Stoller also takes us beyond the specific and appealing aspects of Rouch's work towards a vision of the future course of ethnographic practice and representation. Using Rouch's notion of shared or participatory anthropology as an exemplar, Stoller plots a course towards a 'radical empiricism' and a phenomenology of fieldwork in order to produce a reflexive and more artistic kind of anthropological expression. He proffers the thought that it is not ethnographic film that is the answer to anthropology's representational and theoretical quandaries; instead, our 'future ethnographic practice is to learn anew how to dream, how to fall in love' (p. 218).

Whether we should take to heart all of these recommendations is an open question. But what is beyond doubt is that this book is full of challenging insights into the forms of representation Rouch has deployed to capture Songhay realities and into the possibilities these forms provide for future anthropological methods. This book is a rich and important source for scholars of West Africa, for those involved in ethnographic film and visual anthropology, and for those who care about the future

directions of field methods and anthropological writing. It is a pity, however, that an ethnographer of around twenty years' standing among the Songhay should mar his text with such a blatant infelicity as 'Tabaski, the Muslim holiday commemorating Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Issac [*sic!*] to God' (p. 87).

ROY DILLEY

RUSSELL THORNTON, *The Cherokees: A Population History*, Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press 1992 [1990]. xvi, 237 pp., References, Index, Tables, Figures, Maps. £10.95.

This is a paperback reissue of the original 1990 edition. The seven chapters cover the manifold issues of Cherokee demographics from the pre-contact period to the 1980s. It is not possible to count a people without having criteria for membership. Identity is therefore a central issue in the book. In the end, it demonstrates that there is no consensus on the question of who is and who is not a Cherokee and that there is therefore no way to know how many Cherokee there are. In the 1980 census only about a third of the 232,344 self-identified Cherokees held tribal membership. This proportion contrasts with the fact that two-thirds of all American Indians reported tribal membership.

The 1980 census forced respondents to make a single choice of racial category, but permitted them to indicate more than one type of ancestry, although only the first two ethnic ancestries were counted. Over half of the Cherokee population reported only American Indian ancestry. Over 50,000 claimed mixed ancestry. About 27,000 listed no American Indian ancestry.

Between the 1970 and 1980 censuses there was an increase of 72 per cent in the number of persons claiming American Indian identity. It is reasonable to assume that this change resulted in large part from shifting self-identifications between the two censuses. During the same period the reported Cherokee population increased by 251 per cent, far exceeding an expected natural growth of 43 per cent. One source of this discrepancy could have been a gross undercounting in 1970. The more likely source is a 'tidal shift in racial identification'. Among plausible reasons for change in racial self-identification are 'ethnic pride movements' of the 1970s, declining racial discrimination, affirmative action programmes and Bureau of Indian Affairs scholarships. These factors would have affected different age groups differently. However, except for children under five, who appear to have been undercounted by 13 per cent, every age group shows a large discrepancy between expected and reported size.

The authors conclude that the discrepancies arose from a variety of causes. What they do not explain is why these factors affected the Cherokee so much more than the American Indian population as a whole. Perhaps the answer is to be sought in part in the fact that there are really several different Cherokee populations, spread from the south-east to the south-west and in various urban centres such as Los Angeles. These

groups have quite various histories, degrees of coherence and degrees of active retention of Cherokee culture and language. Some persons with a vague family memory of a Cherokee relative who in the past would have identified themselves as white, or perhaps black, may today be tempted to claim Cherokee identity. However, the statistical effect of the 'Cherokee grandmother' syndrome is uncalculated.

The great bulk of this book is concerned with issues in historical demography of a more familiar if at least equally vexed kind. Historical estimates of Indian population size are rarely easy to interpret clearly or reliably. Cherokee demographics are complicated by various forced migrations in the historical period and by continuous difficulties about the nature of Cherokee identity. The size of the 1840 population after the 'Trail of Tears' march from Georgia to what is now Oklahoma is quite unknown. The authors try to arrive at a figure by extrapolation forward from 1835 and backward from later in the century. These projections produce a possible figure of over 10,000 Cherokee who would have been alive if the Trail of Tears had not happened. Nevertheless, these calculations merely give a number to an uncertainty which was there before.

R. H. BARNES

STEVEN VERTOVEC (ed.), *Aspects of the South Asian Diaspora* (Oxford University Papers on India, Vol. 2, Part 2), Delhi: Oxford University Press 1991. xvi, 201 pp., References, Index. £11.95.

With refreshing honesty, the title of this collection of papers, from a conference held in Oxford in 1987 on 'South Asian Communities Overseas', announces its disparate nature. The seven papers give an idea of the very different kinds of work being done by anthropologists, geographers and religious studies specialists.

Helweg and Bhachu provide conventional surveys of Indian immigrants in Australia and East African Sikhs in Britain respectively. While no doubt useful for those in the field, one misses any feeling for the voices and concerns of the people being written about. Much the same can be said for Kim Knott's programmatic survey of South Asian religions in Britain. She usefully lays out what is known, along with a framework and questions for future research, though without much indication of what these might reveal.

For anthropologists the two most interesting papers may prove to be those by Peter van der Veer and Alison Shaw. In a paper entitled 'Religious Therapies and their Valuation among Surinamese Hindustani in the Netherlands', van der Veer shows how ritual therapies have become part of the internal debate among Hindus. Reformists (mainly followers of the Arya Samaj) would do away with them as superstitious, whereas the traditionalists (who have constituted themselves as Sanatanists) are more ambivalent: while condemning them in public, the Sanatanist pandits often earn a considerable income by practising as healers with these very therapies. Likewise, the Hindu laity mostly seem to espouse a purified Great Tradition in public, while

increasingly resorting in private to ritual therapies, which they acquiesce in labelling as 'superstitious' and 'un-Hindu'. In a paper that provides the most detailed and subtle fieldwork data of the book, Alison Shaw outlines two case-studies of community leaders who emerged among the Pakistanis of 'a British city'.

By exploring the dynamics of interaction between host community professionals, would-be leaders and different factions among Pakistanis, Shaw demonstrates the futility of any simplistic talk of 'the Pakistani community'. She also provides an exemplary case-study of local politics, which, hidden away as it is in a conference collection, will probably not receive the exposure it deserves.

The collection closes with two papers by geographers. The first, by Suresh Patel, is a conventional survey of patterns of Asian retailing in Birmingham. The second is a Marxist study by John Cater and Trevor Jones entitled 'Community, Ethnicity and Class among South Asians in Britain'. They argue that, as with older and now largely superseded community practices among the white working class, 'the ethnic community provides an extremely cheap means of sustaining the ethnic population in Britain: cheap, that is, for British capital.... To the extent that ethnicity and community enable Asians to be *self*-reproducing then the state is relieved of responsibility for their reproduction' (p. 174; original emphasis). The authors maintain that Asians in Britain are obliged to depend on family and female labour, because they are excluded from the resources that White British receive; but at the same time they wish to see 'ethnic community as an expression of the conscious will of its own members' (p. 181). Whether or not they can keep these two balls in the air at the same time (and I also wonder whether their approach is an adequate basis from which to generate research), it is certain that their paper is a welcome antidote to stereotypes of Asians as successful businessmen immune to the class-based exclusions to which Afro-Caribbean and White British are subjected.

DAVID N. GELLNER

JAMES R. WALKER, *Lakota Society* (ed. Raymond J. DeMallie), Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press 1992 [1982]. xvi, 207 pp., Bibliography, Index, Illustrations. £9.50.

This paperback reissue of the hardback edition of 1982 is the second volume of documents about the Oglala Lakota recorded by Walker, who served at Pine Ridge Reservation from 1896 to 1914. As with *Lakota Belief and Ritual* (edited by Elaine A. Jahner and Raymond J. DeMallie), this book provides unpublished and carefully corrected and re-edited published pieces that, taken together, substantially enhance our understanding of Lakota society. Much of this material was recorded at the instigation of Clark Wissler of the American Museum of Natural History, who visited Pine Ridge in 1905. He engaged Walker, the medical doctor on the reservation, and Charles and Richard Nines, white men who had grown up with Oglala and were fluent in Lakota, to continue ethnographic collecting for the museum. These documents are the result

of this broader collaboration. Authorship of the various documents extends in various ways beyond Walker to include informants and interpreters. DeMallie attributes nine documents to Richard Nines. Other authors of record include John Blunt Horn, Antoine Herman, Spotted Elk, Charles Garnett, Bad Bear, Thomas Tyon, Iron Tail, Woman Dress, Red Feather, No Ears, High Bear, Seven Rabbits, Short Man, Iron Crow, and Beard.

DeMallie has divided the book into three parts: 'The Structure of Society', 'Hunting, War, Ceremony, and Art' and 'Time and History'. The first section begins with legends of the division of the Sioux into 'the Seven Council Fires' and further sub-tribes. It continues with descriptions of chieftainship, band structure, government, societies, gender roles, friendship and kinship. Perhaps of most interest in the accounts of tribal organization is the description of how bands formed and fell apart, as chiefs attracted or lost support. What DeMallie rightly characterizes as the dynamism in social organization and the differences of individual interpretations of shared principles are probably a key to understanding Lakota society in prehistoric and early historic times. Anyone interested in Lakota kinship will now be obliged to consult the restored, retranslated and corrected information for Walker's important early paper (1914) on Oglala kinship terms in Documents 19-22. These documents also complement DeMallie's own substantial contributions on Lakota kinship.

Section II presents a miscellany of information on aspects of daily life. Like the first section, it is of considerable general interest, as it is devoted to a careful comparison of the Oglala winter counts, the illustrated records of the passage of years that provided the Oglala with a chronology of sorts. The central document is the copy made for Walker by No Ears, which extends from 1759 until 1912. DeMallie's commentary on comparative and interpretative issues is particularly helpful. He includes a compilation of the No Ears, Short Man and Iron Crow counts with his own translation. He also publishes the drawings from Short Man's winter count. There is a discrepancy of a year, from 1823 until 1848/9, between No Ears and Short Man, which can throw off the unwary reader. The final document is a ghastly description of the Wounded Knee massacre by a survivor named Beard.

R. H. BARNES

RUBIE S. WATSON and PATRICIA BUCKLEY EBREY (eds.), *Marriage and Inequality in Chinese Society*, Berkeley etc.: The University of California Press 1991. xvii, 370 pp., References, Index, Figures, Map, Tables. \$49.95.

This book concerns the study of gender and marriage. As such it represents a departure from the majority of previous studies, which have tended to focus on the patrilineal characteristics of Chinese kinship. The contributors, mostly historians but also a sociologist and an anthropologist, provide a comprehensive picture covering the Great Tradition of upper-class élites and imperial royalty from the classical period to the present, in addition to the Little Tradition of the commoners.

One of the themes discussed is how gender inequality between husband and wife, in families of both commoners and royals, relates to the socio-political sphere. Thatcher claims that as early as the Spring and Autumn dynasties (770–453 BC), the marriages of élite women served the purpose of creating political alliances. Holmgren delineates the relationship between imperial marriages and the political role of the emperor's wife in both native Chinese and non-Han states from the Han (206 BC–AD 220) to the Ming dynasties (1368–1664). Chaffee (p. 159) specifically discusses the balance of power as affected by clan marriage exchanges of dowries and official titles, as well as the Confucian norms of obedience to husbands despite the high status of the wife in the Sung dynasty (960–1279). With regard to the Ch'ing dynasty (1644–1911), Rawski discusses how marriage and succession practices prevented substantial political challenges to the throne from affines, but did not guard against challenges from agnates.

In general, women are not considered to be passive participants shaped by the system of moral beliefs and sanctioned norms. On the contrary, Mann (p. 222) investigates how women—their literacy, religiosity and strivings for comfort and security—helped to provoke the mid-Ch'ing discourse on marriage and posed a challenge to the social order. Hershatler discusses prostitutes in the early twentieth century in the context of women as subjects/objects, while Ocko discusses the perpetuation of gender inequality in the People's Republic of China. The sociologist Lavelly likewise discusses how marriage has related to social mobility under rural collectivism since 1949. Drawing on his recent fieldwork, Watson discusses the status of wives and concubines in the New Territories of Hong Kong.

The contributors also investigate the important issue in gender studies of the relationship between women and property and women as property, with special reference to dowry as a basis for political alliance. Ebrey claims that in the transition from the Tang (617–907) to the Sung (960–1279) dynasties the importance of the dowry increased as it became a means to strengthen the ties between families of social and political equals and to balance the power between families of unequal status. Dowry escalation is believed to lead to a more major shift in the system of transmitting property toward 'diverging devolution', to use Jack Goody's term. As I have found in my fieldwork in Fanling Wai, in the New Territories of Hong Kong, dowry exists today but is of little value and has no great significance for the villagers. Daughters usually inherit nothing from the father, and although this is changing under the influence of the Western bilateral system, land is still never given to daughters but only to sons. Further ethnographic research needs to be done to relate the current situation to Goody's concept.

Overall the book is successful in its investigation of gender inequality as it relates to the socio-economic sphere and corporate groups, but it underemphasizes the descent ideology. The unequal descent status of sons and daughters stems from birth in that only sons are born with a *fang* descent status, while daughters acquire membership in a patrilineal descent group via their husbands. This difference in acquiring status relates to socio-economic gender inequality and would have merited fuller discussion.

SELINA CHING CHAN

ANTHONY P. COHEN, *Self Consciousness: An Alternative Anthropology of Identity*, London and New York: Routledge 1994. xi, 217 pp., References, Index.

For most of this century, the notion that the self is socially or culturally determined has been the dominant theoretical perspective in British social anthropology. According to Anthony Cohen, it has led anthropologists to attribute an individual's behaviour and mental state to the group or category, such as nationality, ethnic group, gender, religion and so on, to which he or she belongs. We assume, unreasonably, that orthodox performances express similarity of thought and consciousness—that mental states can be read from behaviour or simply from membership in a particular group. In so assuming, we deny individuals self consciousness and represent them as automata who do not have to think, as actors performing roles to a script we have written largely through our use of categories rather than self conscious individuals reflecting on their own behaviour and their social and cultural context. Consequently, Cohen says, we have been dealing with 'bogus entities' and 'fictitious ciphers of the anthropologist's theoretical invention' (p. 7).

Our general concern with behaviour neglects the variety of motivations, meanings and perceptions underlying actions. Even among closely knit groups we cannot assume the existence of common understandings and meanings. We may all obey the same law, for example, but our motives for doing so may be vastly different; we may all participate in the same religious ritual, pray the same liturgy and speak the same language, but we are under an illusion if we assume that these social forms convey the same meaning to each of us. For Cohen, culture and society form a framework where shared forms of exchange, politics, communication and so on provide broad limits on what an individual can do, but not what he or she will do within those limits. Society's rules are constructed in accordance with publicly expressed and affirmed principles, but these principles are often circumvented in practice by individuals who reinterpret and reconfigure them for their own purposes.

Cohen's 'alternative anthropology of identity' inverts the traditional 'society to individual' approach to an 'individual to society' one. He urges us to recognize the strength of the authorial self in the construction of society and culture. Individuals in any group are conscious of their unique identity within that group. The self is not a passive object of society and culture but is the agent of culture, making its own world through interpreting its social and cultural context. Failure to adopt this 'individual to society' perspective risks misrepresenting the people we claim to know and represent in our ethnographies. Moreover, this perspective, Cohen argues, brings us back to some of anthropology's most fundamental questions. How do groups cohere when internal discourse is so diverse? How is it that group symbols, so variously interpreted, result in attachment and commitment to the group? In short, how is society possible?

*Self Consciousness* is not a polemical work but a demonstration of this alternative anthropology. Drawing on a large number of ethnographies, Cohen shows how an interpretation from an individualistic perspective provides insights into the nature of the self and society. In some cases this perspective was taken by the original author Cohen cites. In others, he demonstrates how the material can be reinterpreted.

There are a few drawbacks to the book. *Self Consciousness* is not an easy read, being relatively dense, repetitious and vague. For example, self consciousness, 'the



real subject matter of the book', is defined as 'consciousness of the self'. In an endnote to the preface this is distinguished from 'self-conscious' (i.e. with a hyphen) which is 'the colloquial sense of heightened sensitivity to the self'. This 'definition' leaves one wondering what self consciousness is, and how it is constituted. In chapter three he tells us that the self is constituted by experience. But this either presupposes the self or is deterministic. If we are simply the sum of our experiences (not what Cohen intends), differing only because we have different experiences, then we are determined. If, on the other hand, the self is constituted by the assimilation or interpretation of experience, then the self is presupposed—what is it, if not the self, that assimilates or interprets experience?

The basic questions Cohen asks are: Who am I?, Who are we? (p. 119), and What do the symbols of my cultural milieu mean to me? In answering them, he argues, we can begin to answer the anthropological questions: Who are you? and What do these symbols mean to you? These are subjective questions requiring subjective answers. Indeed, as Cohen has tried to demonstrate, we are all individuals, and the same things will mean or symbolize different things to each of us. This creates an epistemological difficulty. Although symbols are cultural and therefore public forms, their meanings and interpretation are substantially individual and private; hence they are unavailable to the anthropologist (p. 142).

Perhaps a more appropriate question to ask might be not *who* but *what*. What are we? What sort of creatures are we that we can have a sense of self or that we possess self-consciousness? What sort of creatures are we that things can have meaning and symbolic value?

The book deals with an important issue and is a valiant attempt to provide a positive alternative to the interpretation of ethnographic material. But it raises more questions than it answers. For this reason it is worthwhile reading for those interested in cognitive anthropology, symbolic anthropology and questions of identity.

CHRIS HOLDSWORTH

HELENA WAYNE (ed.), *The Story of a Marriage: The Letters of Bronislaw Malinowski and Elsie Masson* (2 Vols.), London and New York: Routledge 1995. Vol. I: xviii, 196 pp., Illustrations, Map, Notes, Index; Vol. II: viii, 261 pp., Illustrations, Notes, Index.

'There are different layers in the things we do, life flows in different currents and though the deepest stream matters most and I would like you always to try and give me the trend of your inmost feelings and your real metaphysical life, the ripple on the surface also will interest me always' (Vol. I, p. 46). This passage—so typical of Malinowski, who always wanted to get below the surface of things—was written by him to his future wife, Elsie Masson (the mysterious E.R.M. of his *Diary*), on his way to the Trobriand Islands on 10 November 1917. For the next eighteen years Malinowski and Elsie wrote faithfully to each other whenever they were apart, even if for only a few days. Considering that they lived on three continents and wrote to

one another from nearly two dozen countries it is remarkable that most of their letters have survived. They have now been collected and edited in two volumes by their youngest daughter, Helena. Volume I contains the letters from their first meeting in 1916 to the beginning of 1920, when they left for Europe. Volume II covers the period from their arrival in Europe in April 1920 to Elsie's death in 1935.

Most of the letters in the first volume were written during Malinowski's second field trip to the Trobriand Islands between 1917 and 1918. There is much in them that is reminiscent of Malinowski's *Diary*: the vivid description, the frequent use of the word 'nigger', his hypochondria (Malinowski had all his teeth removed before he returned to the Trobriands, hoping that this would improve his health), the constant longing for E.R.M., and so on. Indeed, the letters are little more than an addendum to his *Diary*, providing scant additional information about his fieldwork methods or the development of his thought. Volume II similarly gives only an occasional glimpse into the development of his ideas. The letters are a chronicle of Malinowski's trips abroad, the people he met (which seems to have been nearly everyone who was anyone), and his lectures at the LSE (Elsie was in Italy and Austria for much of the time that Malinowski was in London), as well as more practical matters. The letters do, however, provide great insights into Malinowski the man, who is seen here as a loving husband and devoted father.

For this reason, *The Story of a Marriage* is indispensable for Malinowski scholars, though there is little of general anthropological interest. But then it is the 'story of a marriage'. The letters in Volume I tell of the blossoming and growth of their love, of their eventual marriage, and of their hopes and dreams of a future together in Europe. Volume II tells of Malinowski's rise to fame and the poignant story of Elsie's courageous fight against her increasingly debilitating multiple sclerosis and her desperate search for a cure. It is for this story, and for the fact that every letter, without exception, is beautifully written, that *The Story of a Marriage* should be read by anyone interested in personal relationships.

CHRIS HOLDSWORTH

JEREMY BOISSEVAIN (ed.), *Revitalizing European Rituals*, London and New York: Routledge 1992. ix, 204 pp., References, Indexes. £35.00.

One of a series of prompt publications resulting from the European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA) inaugural conference held in Coimbra in 1990, this book brings the anthropology of Europe right into the limelight at a time when some anthropologists may have been attempting to negate its validity and pertinence. There is certainly no lack of diversity in society within Europe, nor of 'otherness', if that is the prerequisite for fruitful enquiry, and *Revitalizing European Rituals* is evidence enough of this. A tendency to think of European rituals with any vestige of longevity as being in decline, or in some sense corrupted, has more to do with notions of purity and the legitimacy of change than with the practice of festivities.

Not only have public festivities been on the increase in Europe over the last twenty years, as these studies from Britain, Poland, Spain, Italy, Malta and Greece testify, but they have also been part of a process of transformation informed by changing migration patterns, cultural and political formations and, not least, tourism. This collection looks at the nature of the transformation by expanding the idea of invention to include revival and reanimation, restoral and resurrection, retraditionalization and folklorization. All of these further facets are incorporated into the notion of revitalization, which is to be seen in the rituals and 'traditions' of many parts of Europe at present.

As a response to Hobsbawm and Ranger the collection deals with contemporary local rather than national celebrations (apart from Mach's account of Polish May Day), paying more attention to processes and events of ritual change in a wider social context. In other words, as Boissevain points out: 'They attempt to answer Why questions as well as What questions' (p. 2). Nor do they shirk from the political considerations which infiltrate or even initiate such public demonstrations. Mach's account of Polish May Day celebrations is the most obvious example, but Poppi's analysis of Ladin carnival is equally explicit in its consideration of the 'political economy of tradition' (p. 113).

In the first of the articles, Wright highlights the pervasive and pernicious contemporary obsession with 'heritage' by setting it in opposition to 'critical history'. The former representations are 'divorced from the economic and political relations in which they were located in their time; tensions, conflicts, and divisions are expunged' (p. 20). This heritage image of society demands 'passive acceptance of external processes of change' (p. 21), as opposed to a critical use of the past which 'shap[es] the spaces and opportunities for change in the present' (ibid.). Such a perspective has much to say about nationalism too, as Poppi shows. Although Ladins were once part of a continuum of variety in the Tyrol, between their Austrian and Italian neighbours, a rising tide of nationalism on both sides left them to build up a separate 'Ladin tradition', neither German nor Italian. Reference to the past is seen as crucial in the creation of a political economy of difference, and the carnival is one of a series of cultural traits revived or created anew 'as a carrier of a specific "traditional"—and therefore "Ladin"—character' (p. 118).

Three forms of celebration in Spain are looked at with respect to ideas of 'modernization'. In all cases, this entails some degree of re-contextualization, be it the attraction of outside spectators to patronal festivals in the Jerte valley (Cruces and Díaz de Rada), performances of Andalusian dawn bell-ringers in the evenings (Driessen) or the transformation of a pilgrimage by media-men and 'yuppies' (Crain).

This collection takes the debate over heritage and history forward into European ethnography, showing to anyone who may doubt it (and there are still doubters) that European anthropologists must consider the inherent power relations of their work if anthropology is to move forward into the next century with any conviction.

SIMONE ABRAM

ALFRED GELL, *Wrapping in Images: Tattooing in Polynesia* (Oxford Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology), Oxford: Clarendon Press 1993. xi, 347 pp., Bibliography, Index, Figures. £35.00.

Anchored at its corners by Hawaii, Aotearoa (New Zealand) and Rapa Nui (Easter Island), the Polynesian triangle has long attracted anthropologists and other researchers intrigued by the opportunity for controlled comparison presented by these far-flung yet closely related cultures. *Wrapping in Images: Tattooing in Polynesia*, Alfred Gell's recent contribution to this tradition, argues that in historic Polynesia the frequency and extent of tattooing co-varied with contextual social and political characteristics. In Chapter 1, Gell establishes a theoretical framework for the discussion of tattooing and social structure. Synthesizing the work of Mauss, Foucault, M. Strathern, T. Turner, Anzieu and others, he proposes that 'socially appropriate self-understandings' are formed and reproduced through the deployment, display and modification of the body. The succeeding chapters demonstrate that it is in the mid-range between face-to-face intimacy and anonymity that tattooing becomes a significant medium for socio-political expression (p. 301). According to this schema, tattooing is incompatible with a largely depersonalized state (Hawaii), and redundant in a small or isolated polity (Tuamotus, Pukapuka). Tattooing receives its greatest elaboration in societies where the status hierarchy is either fragmented and competitive (Marquesas, New Zealand) or integrated and well established (Samoa), so that it becomes the bodily registration of 'the politics of defiance' or commitment to authority.

Overall, Gell's approach is synchronic rather than diachronic, for he quite rightly points out that gaps in the primary sources preclude a fully ethnohistorical study (pp. 41–2). This orientation may also result partly from his acknowledged dependence, as a Melanesianist, on the 'pre-masticated Polynesia' available in the scholarly literature (p. v). As Nicholas Thomas's finely textured analysis in *Marquesan Societies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1990) demonstrates, there is still much archival material to be incorporated into the literature—including descriptive and visual records of the tattoos of known individuals that would have enabled Gell to include more specifically ethnohistorical analysis in his study. While Gell's arguments are compelling, his conclusions may be modified as further archival and, in some cases, field data are brought to bear.

At the heart of this work are the chapters that focus on individual Polynesian cultures: Western Polynesia (Samoa, Tonga) and Fiji, the Society Islands, the Marquesas, Mangareva, and outer Eastern Polynesia (New Zealand, Chatham Islands, Easter Island, Hawaii). They include much sensitive and creative exegesis, integrating the visual analysis of tattooing designs and practices with a discussion of politics, religion and mythology. Gell takes care throughout to link tattooing with visual representations of the body and tattoo in a variety of media. In this respect, the relationship between textile and tattoo designs could have been explored further, for Gell makes the important point that textiles and tattoos are not functionally equivalent: while tattooing creates a non-removable second skin, wrapping in textiles has as much to do with taking off social skins as putting them on (pp. 87–91). The similarities and differences between textile and tattoo motifs in Hawaii, the Society Islands, Tonga and

other Polynesian cultures suggest that this dialectic was played out in visual as well as gestural terms.

One of the most intriguing and potentially controversial parts of this book is Gell's analysis of the relationship between Euro-American and Polynesian tattooing in the opening and closing chapters. That the two are now bound up together—at least in the Western mind—is obvious from the fact that 'tattoo' is one of the few Austronesian loan-words to appear in European languages (along with 'mana' and 'taboo'). Inspired by Sperber's epidemiological model of cultural representation, Gell proposes that certain characteristics of tattooing as an expressive medium make it appealing to 'susceptible populations', from Polynesian islanders to Western soldiers, prostitutes and gangsters (p. 19). With warnings about the need for cultural relativism and the danger of pursuing ideas too far, Gell notes an affinity between the 'paranoid excess' of tattooing as practised in devolved Polynesian societies and the oppositional element in sub-cultural tattooing in the West, and also between the 'passive heroism' of Samoan youths and that of regimental soldiers. Those interested in the revival of tattoo in contemporary Polynesia as an expression of cultural identity may find this discussion suggestive, as will those exploring the mechanics and politics of cultural borrowing in an increasingly global environment.

Several editorial errors mar what is otherwise a well-written volume. In Chapter 3, the Society Islanders' name for themselves, Maohi or Ma'ohi (a cognate of the more familiar Maori), is misspelled Moahi. Moriori, the name of the Chatham Islanders, though correctly spelled in the index and elsewhere (e.g. p. 290), is misspelled Moriri on pp. 268–70. Less obvious errors also occur (for example, in the bibliography William Thomson's *Te Pito te Henua, or Easter Island* is listed as *Te Pito de Henua, or Easter Island*, and the surname of the Hawaiian writer Samuel Kamakau is listed as Kamakan). There is a similar problem with the figure captions, which are generally incomplete. Most of the objects are credited only to secondary sources, without the provenance, date, measurements or, in some cases, materials being listed. In addition, Sydney Parkinson's study of Society Islands buttock tattoos (fig. 3.1) is misattributed to Sir Joseph Banks.

None the less, *Wrapping in Images* is an impressive scholarly achievement which will interest both those new to Polynesia and specialists in the field. For the novice, this book provides a useful introduction to the region and its scholarship (though a map would have increased its value to this readership). Gell presents provocative ideas about both Polynesian cultures and the nature of tattooing which will undoubtedly stimulate further discussion in anthropology, art history and culture studies, especially given the recent interest in the body as a category of analysis. More specifically, this work presents a detailed test case which has the potential to shape ongoing debates about the relationships between Polynesian cultures.

ANNE D'ALLEVA

CATHERINE A. LUTZ and JANE L. COLLINS, *Reading National Geographic*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press 1993. xvii, 309 pp., References, Index, Figures, Table, Photographs. £15.95/\$22.95.

As for so many other people, *National Geographic* was part of my childhood. My father subscribed to it for my brother and me when I was about seven years old, and it was my first glimpse of a world beyond my sheltered north-country upbringing. I loved it, the rich yellow cover and smell of the glossy paper—and the pictures. I cannot remember any details of the first encounter beyond the horror of an advertisement for an American drug company in the form of a painting representing a shipboard amputation. When I first saw *Reading National Geographic* I wondered whether it was going to reveal the foundations of my own academic obsessions with images. Would it be a kind of analysis or therapy?

The volume sets out to untangle the massive success and influence of this American institution of serious popular science, in particular its use of photographs, for which it is so famous. Lutz and Collins look at the history and ethnography of the magazine and its strategies, how stories and photographs are chosen, and the ways in which images and texts work together to perpetuate a very particular, culturally constructed reading of racial and cultural difference that reflects the wider values of American society. In this the authors have tackled an immense subject of deep complexity, for the subject-matter is, in a nutshell, the consumption of much of the rest of the world, especially the distant and developing world, by a massive section of the American public, especially amongst the white middle classes.

The authors relate this ethnography of the institution, its marketing and its readership to theories of photographic realism, mass consumption, shifts in American foreign policy and social change within American society as expressed through attitudes to development, war, women, civil rights, tourism and the exotic. It is within this enormous sweep that the weakness of the volume lies. Lutz and Collins ask all the right questions, such as to what extent are popular notions of race, gender, the exotic or development and progress in the 'Third World', informed and sustained by *National Geographic*, to what extent does coverage in *National Geographic* reflect US foreign policy interests, and where does the main focus of coverage lie? They produce very interesting data to show, for instance, the preponderance of Asian subjects, or that as a ratio of articles to the population of an area, Latin America and the Pacific far outstrip other regions. Africa is the most under-represented, being perceived as a 'problem area', the site of violence and famine. Here two themes come together: the role market forces play in the selection of topics, and the relentlessly positive attitude of *National Geographic*—if something positive cannot be said, don't run the story—a policy which obviously causes tensions between the editors or caption-writers and the serious and committed documentary photographers who contribute to it. It meant, for instance, that Korean War coverage amounted to cheerful US troops doling out ice-cream to equally cheerful 'dark-eyed' children.

Yet for all this there is something deeply irritating about the way the argument is constructed. The theoretical position underlying the authors' critique rests in uncomfortable lumps of semi-digested photographic theory and sociology of consumption, interspersed with potted histories of racial attitudes, the civil rights

movement, the status of women or the Vietnam War. This is never integrated fully with the detailed reading of the images themselves and thus is never applied with its full analytical potential. No knowledge is ever assumed; rather than covering their backs, the authors have succeeded in fragmenting their argument. Their habit of quoting other authors with 'as X has said', rather than absorbing and moulding concepts for their own analytical use, only reinforces this. At times this becomes deeply irritating, for example, 'Who was Saddam Hussein and—to paraphrase Freud—what did he want?' (p. 281). They are not helped—and this may seem a strange criticism for an academic book—by their desperate attempts at objectivity and impartiality. One longs for just a little bit of polemic. I couldn't work out quite what was unsettling me until I got to their otherwise interesting illustrated discussion of why Ronald Haeberle's photographs of the My Lai massacre during the Vietnam War did not appear in *National Geographic* (they were published in *Life* magazine). Of these images, which are surely etched into the collective consciousness of the Euro-American world, they write that they show 'the anguished faces of a small group of people from My Lai village just before they were murdered' (p. 100). Anguish? Mere anguish? This is total, raw, unalleviated terror. The authors' language appears to have absorbed the banality of *National Geographic*. Only in the epilogue, on the Gulf War, which broke out after the main text was finished, does one sense what the book could have been, but by then it is too late, and the epilogue sits uncomfortably and unfocused; we have become bogged down in a stultifying, gentle liberal humanism.

Having said all this, *Reading National Geographic* is an important book which should be read by anyone interested in the intersection of imagery, popular culture and global relations. It does include some rich material which I would gladly have seen extended at the expense of some other sections: the ethnography of the *National Geographic* institution itself is considered and revealing. The way the interview material is integrated and edited (leaving in all the hesitations, 'ums', 'ers' and 'sort ofs') in analysing the consumption of images (always methodologically tricky) is equally revealing, though their random sample is small (twenty images) and comes from a relatively limited time-span (1977–86). But as I have suggested, the volume also demonstrates the pitfalls of trying to write something which is in effect the outcome of complex cultural, economic and political relations between the US and the rest of the world as a contained ethnography.

ELIZABETH EDWARDS

JAMES D. FAUBION, *Modern Greek Lessons: A Primer in Historical Constructivism* (Princeton Studies in Culture / Power / History, eds. Sherry B. Ortner, Nicholas B. Dirks and Geoff Eley), Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1993. xxiv, 307 pp., Bibliography, Index, Photographs. \$35.00.

This is a study of modernity and the way it is conceived, experienced and debated in modern Greece. Faubion takes as his focus the Athenian middle class, particularly the

intellectuals whom he alternatively refers to, correctly, as a sociocultural élite. The presentation does not resemble conventional ethnography.

During the period of fieldwork the author resided mainly in the upper-middle-class neighbourhood of Kolonaki—the Kensington of Athens—but he did not attempt to conduct a study of social relations in this circumscribed locality. Instead he pursued middle-class ideas about gender, history, tradition, individualism and modernity as they cropped up in the daily press, at dinner parties, in interviews with selected informants and in any number of other contexts. Faubion could best be described as a latter-day flaneur wandering the streets of the capital, with a keen eye for detail—of architecture, personal dress, the activities of stray cats and the manner in which rubbish is disposed of—which he then uses to comment on Greek conceptions of modernity and ‘civilization’ (*politismos*), or the lack of them.

I had assumed the topic of ‘modernity’ to be fairly dead in anthropology. Weber wrote about it early in the century, and after the Second World War prominent sociologists such as Parsons and Bendix took it up again. It was an idea that seemed important for global development, and it featured in the applied social-science literature which various First-World governments commissioned and drew upon. Anthropologists were never that interested in it; in fact they criticized it as an ethnocentric concept which tended to impose a stereotypical gap between us and the people we wanted to understand. In any case it proved very difficult to define modernity rigidly; the people we assumed to be non-modern were not so for consistent reasons. Marxist sociology carried on a decades-long debate as to whether the trajectory of modernizing countries would repeat the course of events experienced by Britain, France or the USA. Following Weber, albeit with many qualifications, Faubion more or less agrees that modernity involves a rupture with a traditional world that was probably more homogeneous, consensual and solidary in its world-view and social forms. Modernity introduced social and ideological diversity, but these were not just facts of the historical coupure with tradition—doubt, dissent and difference formed some of the perennial, internalized, subjective qualities of what it might mean to be modern.

*Modern Greek Lessons* consistently attempts to reveal and analyse how the trope of doubt pervades the middle class’s questions about its relation to ancient Greece as opposed to Byzantium as opposed to the Ottoman Empire as opposed to Europe. He argues that these doubts are not neatly resolved but result rather in various hybridities, compromises where all of these possible historical identities are blended. This is evident in the cityscape where streets are named after ancient poets, Church Fathers, national heroes, and foreigners ranging from Lord Byron to Henry Miller. In the living-room of a ‘neo-Byzantine’ Athens house, Greek provincial furniture sits atop Turkish rugs. In Greece, it seems, history will not settle down into layers of pastness; on the contrary, any number of past periods can coexist in the present. Of course, this happens as a result of social agency and intentionality—the Greek language did not spontaneously introduce archaizing forms into itself in the nineteenth century.

Obviously this was done by grammarians with a cause. Faubion makes a contribution to the anthropological study of how history is used in Greece by applying the concept of metalepsis (substitution), borrowed from Harold Bloom’s studies of literary influence. Metalepsis can be either introjective or projective, an absorption of the present into the past or vice versa. In its turn, this ‘historical constructivism’ serves



as an idiom for talking about modernity; one defines oneself in relation to the question of modernity by the syncretic, metaleptic syntax one chooses to string together. Modernity thus becomes a proper topic of anthropological interest in so far as it forms a subject of popular discourse and social experience in places like Greece where its appropriation, attribution or denial can now be studied ethnographically.

This book has been criticized in the Greek press for its errors, and it is true that there are many minor mistakes in Faubion's presentation of names and places and in his analysis of Greek words. In his very interesting chapter on masculinity and homosexuality, for example, he gets the grammatical gender of the word for 'gender' wrong (*phylō* is neuter). But these are pedantic quibbles that do not affect his main points. Readers may find his dense writing style more annoying, but in a book devoted to the plurality of individual positions and the pervasiveness of social doubt and stylistic oppositions—all characteristics of modernity—a smooth, totalizing narrative was never on the cards.

CHARLES STEWART

FRANÇOISE ZONABEND, *The Nuclear Peninsula* (transl. J. A. Underwood), Cambridge etc.: Cambridge University Press 1993 [1989]. xii, 138 pp., Index, Illustrations. £19.95/\$39.95.

Despite a wealth of sociology of work and industry, there is a striking lack of anthropological studies of industrial work. We have long recognized that anthropology needs to come closer to home and that the urban should be considered as well as the rural; but most urban studies have focused on issues of class, race or gender, and even in the growing anthropology of Europe, few have considered industry or industrial work. When we consider how large a proportion of the world has been industrialized, this is little short of astounding, but anthropology could be said to have risen out of a general nostalgia for non-industrialized society; indeed, the primitive was defined directly in opposition to industrial civilization, whether within or outside Europe. Although European anthropologists have left such issues to sociologists and psychologists, the anthropological approach has much to offer in complementing those of other disciplines, and the field of industrial or professional work presents a fascinating arena for anthropologists to discover.

La Hague, the nuclear peninsula of Zonabend's title, is on the northern coast of France and gains its unfortunate nickname from the development there, since the Second World War, of a nuclear reprocessing plant, a nuclear munitions arsenal and a nuclear power-station. This has transformed the working lives and social environment of the former farming and fishing community, and they have had to come to terms with living in the midst of potentially dangerous industrial plant. Their reactions to this radical transformation of the environment form the subject of Zonabend's study. However, given this wide-open subject, and also the impressive track record of Françoise Zonabend, whose previous studies of a French village have become classics

of European anthropology, it is difficult to imagine how the present volume could have been more disappointing.

Zonabend begins with a preface explaining how she began her study in the leafy lanes of Normandy, where she was initially thinking of studying kinship. However, 'time passed, and it was not until several months later that I thought again about the industrial buildings springing up in increasing numbers on the plateau right behind my house. That was when I became conscious of the fact that in this place two opposing worlds existed side by side. Coming and going between Paris and this spot at the back of beyond, I found that a fresh surprise greeted me on each return' (p. ix). Zonabend thus sets up a dichotomy between one world locked in a remote past, in dwellings where 'a wood fire burns all year round in the tall fireplace in the communal room, tended by an old woman kneeling on the stone hearth in ancestral pose, [where] time does indeed stand still', and another, 'wide open to the technology of the future', where 'that tranquillity is shattered' (p. x).

It is easy to trace this view of industry and modernity back to Georges Henri Rivière's dichotomy between rurality and modernity, and equally easy to see as a modern metropolitan view of tradition and rurality, but it is difficult to stomach this as a basis for a study of attitudes to risk and work. Although the author herself casts some doubt on this position, describing herself as an 'ostensibly impartial, neutral observer' (p. 1), one suspects early on that the book provides an arena for the author to espouse her own prejudices rather than attempt to explain those of the people of La Hague. Indeed, one's suspicions are immediately furthered when the author claims to be 'trying to capture thoughts, feelings, and private, secret areas of behaviour that people likewise find difficult to express in speech' (ibid.). Although I sympathize profoundly with a researcher trying to do fieldwork among people who tend not to express themselves much in speech, how can we believe that the author has discovered private thoughts and feelings? Indeed, throughout the book, Zonabend refers to 'repressed fears' and 'latent anxieties', applying a very elementary psychoanalysis in an unconvincing manner. For example, she describes long conversations with people who described in detail how safety precautions at the reprocessing plant meant that there was little danger for them. However, when doubts were expressed over the extent of knowledge about the side-effects of radiation, Zonabend takes these to express a 'repressed anxiety' which negates the preceding reassurances. But why should we believe her rather than accept that people are generally quite satisfied about the risks, despite their occasional residual doubts? It is apparent that Zonabend herself is deeply troubled about nuclear energy and that it is she who harbours the most serious fears about the nuclear plant. As a result, the most penetrating questions about people's perceptions and tolerances of risk (particularly in reference to the possible effects of radiation on child development) are bypassed rather than exploited, as Zonabend hardly looks beyond her own preoccupations.

It is also clear that Zonabend's understanding of the technological processes involved is superficial, leading her to ignore any quasi-scientific discourse as smoke-screening. In the introduction, she brings up the central question of the discourses which people use to talk about the plant: 'if you ask technicians directly about the jobs they do in the plant and about the risks to which they are exposed when entering radioactive areas or handling ionising products, they reply readily enough, it is true, but

they do so in a wholly remote, impersonal way, using technical terminology in an ostensibly “scientific” type of utterance very like that found in current publications dealing with this type of work’ (p. 3). This suggests to me that the technicians respond in the language in which they understand the question, that they are well informed, and that this tells us something about how they think about the work. However, to Zonabend it suggests that ‘all questions bearing directly on incidents that might have happened to the interviewee were parried or obscured in this way by a scientific discourse’, so that ‘what is involved here is a way of the speaker not saying or not hearing himself say something he wished to conceal’ (p. 4). Indeed, this wholesale dismissal of scientific discourse and later of technical language strikes one as indicating Zonabend’s own difficulty with such language and her failure to recognize ways of thinking other than her own as valid or meaningful.

There are many ways in which this study could have been made much more convincing. Had Zonabend recognized that many of her observations about workers’ attitudes to the plant are common to many types of industry and other work, then a comparison between the behaviour of workers in the nuclear industry with, say, those in the steel or coal industries, or better still, the non-nuclear electrical generation industry, might have enabled her to identify specific attitudes and reactions to the nuclear. As it is, comments about ‘an industry in which worker safety could never be totally guaranteed’ (p. 4) are naive and unspecific. Equally, workers who never tell their families anything about what they do are hardly unusual. This seems to me to be a very widespread trait among engineers in particular. Although we are told that ‘the Hagars have gained a reputation as smugglers and wreckers and are for that reason regarded as folk well-suited to face perils whether old or new’ (p. 14), no comparison is drawn between the people’s approaches to the risks of the sea and those of the nuclear plants. Her treatment of the wider political or technological context is also minimal. Where most of her criticisms of the nuclear installation refer to management techniques or the behaviour of national politicians, Zonabend draws back from extending these arguments into a cohesive criticism. Nor at any point does she reveal any understanding of how and why France’s nuclear policy was developed. Instead, in her section on the politics of nuclear power, she deals only with the local politics of industrial plant taxes and local anti-nuclear demonstrations.

There are interesting points punctuating the book, for example, the way in which work in the plant is organized and workers’ ways of destabilizing the mechanical orderliness of the processes in a bid to avoid boredom. It is unfortunate that these few gems are hidden within Zonabend’s own dominating view of the nuclear industry. In her conclusions, she states that she has not set out to take up ‘a position either for or against the exploitation of this form of energy’ (p. 121), but the final words of the book, describing nuclear waste as ‘[a] kind of rubbish that can never be got rid of, a poison that will linger for all time, an everlasting blemish, permanent, indomitable pandemonium’ (p. 128), leave the reader in no doubt whatsoever that she has done precisely that.

SIMONE ABRAM

TERESA DEL VALLE (ed.), *Gendered Anthropology* (EASA Series), London and New York: Routledge 1993. xii, 227 pp., References, Indexes, Figures, Photographs. £35.00/£11.99.

PATRICIA LYONS JOHNSON (ed.), *Balancing Acts: Women and the Process of Social Change* (Women in Cross-Cultural Perspective; series editor Sue Ellen Jacobs), Boulder, etc.: Westview Press 1992. x, 177 pp., References. £19.50.

BARBARA DIANE MILLER (ed.), *Sex and Gender Hierarchies* (Publications of the Society for Psychological Anthropology 4; eds. Robert A. Paul and Richard A. Shweder), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1993. xix, 401 pp., Index, References, Figures, Tables. £40.00/£14.95/\$64.95/\$19.95.

In her Introduction to *Gendered Anthropology*, Teresa Del Valle argues that 'the acceptance of gender as a new analytical category implies the acceptance of a knowledge that has already been considered marginal and on the periphery' (1993: 16). The essays presented in this collection attempt to reintegrate this marginalized knowledge into mainstream anthropological discourse and challenge traditional perceptions within the discipline. Adopting a mainly theoretical approach to central themes within anthropology, such as kinship, personhood, symbolism and dualistic notions of gender, the authors articulate the centrality of gender to any understanding of power, hierarchy and social structure. Although focusing on gender as the primary constituent of difference, the essays also stress the need for a political and historical context to cultural analysis as well as a recognition of the inter-relationship of 'gender' with other social structures, such as 'race' and 'class'. Thus the book moves forward from an earlier emphasis on gender relationships as almost discrete spheres of interaction towards a more dynamic, complex and integrated understanding of power relationships within which gender differences are constructed and achieve meaning.

Verena Stolcke's essay, for example, argues that sex/gender dualisms are the product of a socially constructed discourse which serves to essentialize and naturalize inequality as biological 'facts'. As with discussions of 'race', 'sex' is constructed as a neutral category, while 'gender', like 'ethnicity', has come to represent socially defined relationships. However, as race/ethnicity distinctions become blurred at the boundaries of nature versus culture, so too do sex/gender constructions. Stolcke asserts, therefore, that all discussions of gender/sex relationships are endowed with social meaning and cannot be divorced from social, historical and political circumstance. Similarly, Signe Howell and Marit Melhuus's essay on kinship and personhood stresses the socially constructed and value-laden meaning of sex/gender attributions, which subordinates the role of women as 'mothers, sisters, daughters and wives' (1993: 43) in the former and renders them invisible in the latter. Studies of personhood in particular, the authors claim, reveal the constructedness of gender, which brings into question the notion of sexual 'difference' as a presocial fact.

Several more ethnographically based essays attempt to explore gender constructions in both 'traditional' societies and 'at home'. Serge Tcherkezoff's dense and complex account of Samoan dualisms, for example, argues that gender and sex distinctions are transformed and reversed at different levels of analysis, while Marianne Gullestad's

account of Norwegian homes illustrates the gendered and class identities of their occupants, allowing for expressions of both sameness and difference within the domestic arena.

*Gendered Anthropology* represents a coherent and consistent attempt to provide a theoretical framework from which to advance and consolidate the study of gender. Most provocative and significant is the concluding essay by Henrietta Moore, which argues for the analysis of gender as merely one form of 'difference' within a Foucauldian framework of power discourse. She argues that 'We have to begin to recognize how persons are constituted in and through difference' (ibid.: 204). This involves a move away from the analysis of 'gender' as a universal distinction to consider the shifting, political and contextual nature of gender formation.

In some ways, *Balancing Acts: Women and the Process of Social Change* can be seen as an attempt to explore some of the theoretical questions and issues raised in Del Valle's book. Focusing on one aspect of gender formation—the role of history and social change—Patricia Lyons Johnson's collection addresses the dynamic nature of gender roles for women throughout the world. Recognizing the increasingly global nature of identity formation, Johnson and her co-authors present a series of complex portraits of women, which acknowledges the inter-relatedness of their social position with wider processes. Its emphasis is thus on continuity and change, on negotiation between the 'traditional' and the 'modern'. Gender is only one element within the changing circumstances which define the lives of women, the exact configuration being constituted by a myriad of individual choices and constraints.

The most striking aspect of the collection is the immediate and personalised nature of the ethnography. Each essay focuses on the ways in which globalized historical processes are actualized on a local level and affect the lives of individual women. This approach allows for a detailed analysis of the complexity of experience and action which such processes involve and precipitate. The scope of the book ranges from !Kung life-history narratives to an exploration of change in Papua New Guinea, India, Ecuador, New Zealand and Spain.

Of particular significance for the anthropological study of gender—and again engaging with issues raised in Del Valle's collection—is the questioning of any homogeneous notion of 'community', and within that, of a uniform understanding of the position of women. Gender is placed within a wider, interactive perspective, which problematizes the isolationist approach to imagined traditional societies. Karen Sinclair's chapter on Maori women and Ann Miles's study of the urban *chola* of Ecuador, for example, take women out of a 'traditional' setting and explore the divisions of experience and self-definition that result. Similarly, Susan Wadley's portrait of the 'village Indira' and Carol McAllister's of the people of Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia, discuss the multiple social, economic, political and religious arenas which structure the lives of women but also allow negotiation between them. Johnson's essay on the Gainj of Papua New Guinea is particularly impressive for the complexity of its analysis.

The inherent tensions involved in studying societies which are constantly in flux are present throughout the book, leading at times to the concretizing and isolation of complex interactive forces. Some of the essays therefore tend to focus on the processes of change as ends in themselves, rather than on the effects of change on the position

of women. In some instances, therefore, the issue of gender disappears from the analysis or becomes marginalized, while other forces affecting the role of women remain unconsidered. Moreover, several of the essays seem to envision social change as a movement away from a static, almost 'pure' traditional culture towards a state of hybridity, opposing the 'traditional' and the 'modern' without recognizing the historical constructedness of both.

Although somewhat more theoretically traditional in its approach to the anthropology of gender—the work still focuses primarily on women rather than gender—*Balancing Acts* does represent an important move towards recognizing the ways in which women are positioned by historical change and wider global forces. The richness and intensity of the ethnography included in the collection, particularly that by Johnson, Sinclair and McAllister, thus provides a convincing foundation from which to explore the theoretical advances of *Gendered Anthropology*.

By contrast, *Sex and Gender Hierarchies* seems a loose and rather eclectic collection of essays, bringing together contributors from archaeology, physical anthropology, social/cultural anthropology and linguistics. The essays range from discussions of gender hierarchies amongst non-human primates to discourses of reproductive technology in the United States, from the analysis of gender among Japanese and Sambia to the skeletons of prehistory and the Queens of Silla. Approaches from within these academic sub-disciplines seemed to vary significantly, with a marked emphasis from some writers on evolution and 'natural' sex/gender roles and a more complex analysis of socially constructed gender from others. The basic theoretical assumptions of the two other books on gender considered here seem to be left largely unresolved and contentious in this volume.

Thus a number of the essays accept the distinction between 'sex' and 'gender' as unproblematic, the former rooted in essential biological characteristics, the latter in cultural constructions. The naturalization of 'sex' as a basis for gender distinctions is a common thread, although some authors simultaneously assert the indeterminacy of the relationship between nature and culture. Barbara Diane Miller writes, 'a penis is a penis whether it is possessed by an orangutan, a Yanomamo or a New Yorker, and the same goes for XX and XY chromosomes' (p. 5). However, she also asserts—but fails to account for—a culturally relative understanding of gender. Discussions of 'sex' are, moreover, closely linked with evolutionary theory, with Joan Silk relating gender hierarchies in hunter-gatherer societies with those found in non-human primates, and Adrienne Zihlman using chimpanzees to explore human gender construction. Both Marvin Harris and Brigitte Hauser-Schäublin assert the biological roots of gender, with Harris arguing that male dominance and chauvinism is based in the male's superior physical size and strength in hunting and warfare. Hauser-Schäublin focuses her argument on blood as a natural and unalterable symbol of gender distinction, but her essay then proceeds to elaborate so many different cultural approaches to it that the original assertion becomes dissolved in cultural relativism.

Counterposed to the biological approaches to gender are a number of chapters on the social construction of gender which are more consistent with the works by Del Valle and Johnson. Rayna Rapp's work on amniocentesis in the United States explores the power discourses of birth and ethnicity, which renders the 'natural' arena of reproduction a politically contested domain. Similarly, Elinor Och's work on gendered

language, and the discussion by Maxine Margolis and Marigene Arnold of male striptease, use contemporary settings 'at home' to analyse the complexities and ambiguities of gender discourses. Other chapters on India and Burma also discuss the historical and political location of gender relations, which allow for social change and multiple spheres of action and ideology affecting gender roles.

*Sex and Gender Hierarchies* is the least consistent and perhaps the least satisfying of the three books reviewed here. Lacking any overall conceptual framework, the work as a whole seems uneven, unwieldy and directionless. It can, however, be seen as encapsulating a more diverse, wide-ranging approach to gender issues which possibly reflects more mainstream attitudes towards the area. By contrast, *Gendered Anthropology* and *Balancing Acts* are tightly focused, clearly argued and politically motivated. In recognizing the political nature of gender issues, the works reflect an engagement with inequality, difference and change which is obscured by traditional approaches to gender both within and without anthropology. In particular, Del Valle's collection is a stimulating and forward-looking work which should provoke a renewed interest in, and serious reconsideration of, the place of gender in anthropology.

CLAIRE ALEXANDER

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