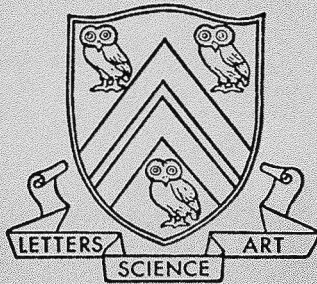


RICE UNIVERSITY STUDIES



STUDIES IN CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

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FOREWORD

Included in this collection of papers are subjects customarily said to fall within the scope of the subfields of anthropology known as ethnology, social anthropology, and anthropological linguistics. Broadly viewed, these three constitute what has traditionally been called "cultural anthropology," a subject of study which deals with varieties of man's behavior and which describes and analyzes his behavior in the scholarly production of basic and applied knowledge. This knowledge is mainly social scientific, but also has elements of the humanities, organic sciences, and physical sciences. Cultural anthropology, like the rest of the discipline of anthropology, has usually focused upon non-Western and preindustrial peoples, but not exclusively.

The present collection of essays was planned to show some of the range of variation of the current research among the cultural anthropologists in the relatively small anthropology department at Rice University. In many ways, this short collection mirrors the highly varied concerns of research in the wider setting of American cultural anthropology. As shown in these papers, cultural anthropology is based upon scholarship that is more insightful and intuitive than "rigorously" inductive, in the manner of the organic and, especially, the physical sciences. Cultural anthropology is predicated upon at least a partial perspective by the researcher of the "native" or insider's viewpoint. To gain this viewpoint, the anthropologist becomes socialized in the setting of his work through long-term, continuous participation in and observation of the native ways of life. The setting studied is therefore viewed by the anthropologist from an internal, familiar, and consequently quite comprehensible vantage point.

Sekandar Amanolahi, a Ph.D. candidate at Rice when the paper was written on the Luti of Iran, and Edward Norbeck describe the outcaste existence of a pastoral nomadic people. The presentation is noteworthy both as a preliminary ethnographic (substantive) survey of a heretofore unstudied people and as an ethnologic (conceptual) contribution to the well-developed study in the social sciences of caste systems and outcaste groups. In this paper, Amanolahi and Norbeck give a lucid, modern treatment to a traditional central concern of cultural anthropology—a topical focus within a pioneering account of an unknown culture.

An elemental part of cultural anthropology has always been the study of language, particularly the unwritten tongues. In the tradition of early American cultural anthropologists who, around the turn of the century, studied the language of the Indians of the Pacific Northwest Coast, Philip Davis and his co-worker, Ross Saunders, studied among the Bella Coola

of British Columbia. Their methodology and topic in structural linguistics and semantics is, as is customary, highly technical. As the authors note, the subject they discuss—deixis (in Bella Coola prefix-suffix pairs)—is difficult to comprehend in its entirety in any language. However, the subject is vital to the development of an adequate theory of language.

In contrast to the basic papers of the other writers, my own paper is largely applied. My piece on the locomotive as a mobile work site contrasts too with most social scientific studies of work sites, because they concern fixed locations such as factories. Fundamentally grounded in the native (railroader) insights provided by the usual intensive participant observation associated with ethnology, the study relies secondarily upon techniques from the long-developed applied physical anthropology of vehicles. The recommendations made in the study will become a part of the effort being made in the mid-1970s by the railroad industry, railroad labor, and government regarding the redesign of the locomotive for efficient and safe productivity in transportation.

Alternatives to the group-centered explanations of society inherent in Western social science are explored by Ronald Provencher, who wrote his dynamic paper on “groups” in Malay society while at Rice. Working with data from Malaysia, he questions the underlying Western assumption of a universal “groupness” in human society. In a like manner, he questions the Western social scientists’ pat depiction of functional interrelations between structural components within the “groups” said to exist in all societies. Regarding the societies labeled by group-social scientists as “disorganized” or “loosely structured,” Provencher explains that these societies do not lack systemic arrangements, but that the group-theory is often inadequate for describing the system.

A fresh, thought-provoking contribution to ethnological theory and the study of Indian culture is made by Stephen Tyler with his paper in the cognitive branch of cultural anthropology. Eschewing the presuppositions of cultural anthropology and Indian areal studies allows Tyler to explain fruitfully the underlying ideology of the social system of Indian castes. He does this by scrutinizing the native Indian folk theory, or interpretation, of caste systemics. Once again, Tyler shows us the close parallels between the metaphorical presentations of what are in reality the myths of social scientific theory and the same kind of metaphors in the myths of folk theory. It is fitting to end this short collection with a paper which causes us to contemplate the distance we yet have to go in the development of cultural anthropology—and in all of social science.

FREDERICK C. GAMST
EDITOR