

# JASO

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## OBITUARY NOTICE

### ANDREW DUFF-COOPER

23 December 1947 - 4 August 1991

It is with deep sorrow that we have to announce the death of Andrew Duff-Cooper on Sunday, 4 August 1991. His death has come as a great loss to his many friends and colleagues.

Andrew will be remembered well by those who attended or visited the Oxford Institute of Social Anthropology in the late 1970s and early 1980s. As a postgraduate student at Merton College from 1976 to 1983, and for a little time afterwards until he moved to Japan, Andrew was very much a part of the Oxford scene (when he was not in the field).

*JASO* readers in particular will remember Andrew as a regular contributor to these pages. Since he first reviewed for us in 1983, six of his articles and eleven reviews have appeared in the Journal, as well as an essay in our fourth Occasional Paper. Indeed, our last issue, in press at the time of his death, contained an essay and a review by him.

We hope to be able to publish in future issues some essays and reviews that remained unpublished at the time of his death. In due course, we also hope to be able to publish a list of all his publications. An obituary by Rodney Needham will appear in the issue after next.

The Editors

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JASO is pleased to announce the publication of the latest volume in its Occasional Papers series.

JASO OCCASIONAL PAPERS NO. 8

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**AN OLD STATE IN NEW SETTINGS: Studies in the Social Anthropology of China in Memory of Maurice Freedman**  
Edited by **Hugh D. R. Baker and Stephan Feuchtwang**

This collection brings together anthropological and historical studies of Chinese society specially written in memory of Maurice Freedman. The papers presented here are by former students, colleagues, and members of the seminar on China which he organised at All Souls College, Oxford, in the last two years of his life. The studies take up the principal themes of Freedman's work: marriage, family and lineage, and Chinese religion. As well as adding to the ethnography of Chinese society, they develop anthropological issues which he articulated on such matters as the territorial politics of lineage organisation, ethnicity, kinship in urban and colonial situations, and the nature of religion. Framing them are the address delivered by Raymond Firth at the memorial service for Freedman, and an obituary and bibliography of his works written and compiled by G. William Skinner.

Hugh D. R. Baker is Professor of Chinese at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. Stephan Feuchtwang heads the China Research Unit in the Department of Social Studies at City University, London.

**Contributors:**

Göran Aijmer, Hugh D. R. Baker, Mark Elvin, Stephan Feuchtwang, Raymond Firth, James W. Hayes, Christine Inglis, Diana Martin, Michael Palmer, G. William Skinner, Soo Ming-wo, and James L. Watson.

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## DISORIENTATIONS: PART THREE

P. A. LIENHARDT

(Edited with an introduction by Ahmed Al-Shahi)

### *Introduction*

THE main theme of this third part of *Disorientations* centres on a discussion of Islam and education, particularly in Failaka Island off the coast of Kuwait where Peter Lienhardt began his fieldwork. Peter here makes two observations about Islam. First, he discusses the variance between Islam in accordance with the 'Book' and what exists in reality in behaviour, practices and rationale. Secondly, he interprets the role of comparative religion in the context of the observer's view of religious beliefs and practices, and that of the people he observed. Since Peter's fieldwork, tension has developed over the role of Islam in the political sphere—a situation which can be found in other Arab and Muslim countries. The majority of Kuwaiti nationals are orthodox Sunnis, a brand of Islam also dominant in other Gulf states and in Saudi Arabia. At the same time, Kuwaitis are tolerant of the

This third part of 'Disorientations' follows directly from 'Disorientations: Part Two', which appeared in the last issue of *JASO* (Vol. XXI, no. 3, pp. 251-67) and to which readers are referred for further information concerning the background to the present publication. It is introduced here by Ahmed Al-Shahi, who has edited the typescript for publication and prepared the footnotes. Both 'Disorientations: Part Three' and Ahmed Al-Shahi's introduction were prepared before Iraq's invasion of Kuwait on 2nd August 1990. The fourth and final part of 'Disorientations' will appear in a future issue of *JASO* with a further introduction by Ahmed Al-Shahi elaborating on its content and discussing some of the main themes of 'Disorientations' as a whole in relation to recent events in Kuwait.

beliefs and observances of other Muslims living in Kuwait who are not Sunnis. This is particularly the case with some immigrants who adhere to Shi'ism, a difference that could cause political difficulties—such as happened during the war between Iran and Iraq, when the Shi'a minority was sympathetic to Iran whereas the orthodox Sunnis supported Iraq. In 1989, a number of bombings were carried out by Kuwaiti Shi'ites. The ceasefire between Iran and Iraq in 1988 was received with relief in Kuwait as well as in the other Gulf states. Religious diversity is recognized by the State, which has succeeded hitherto in striking a balance between the demands of this diversity and the continuity of the ruling family's authority in the country. Based on his observations of nearly forty years ago, Peter raises many issues in his analysis that are evident in the present-day circumstances of Kuwait. This reflects his deep understanding of the fundamental principles that have influenced the thinking and behaviour of the communities of the Gulf.

#### AHMED AL-SHAHI

I was to see more of these offices on my return visits. For the moment, having borrowed a large tent with a great weight of metal posts and pegs from the oil company, it was time for me to hire a fishing launch and cross the seventeen miles of sea that divided the commotion of Kuwait from the quiet village life of Failaka—to exchange the horns of unpredictable cars for the brayings of unmanageable donkeys.

How absurd it seemed, after being denied access to the tents of the Bedouin at Jahra,<sup>1</sup> to find oneself carrying an oil company tent across the sea to erect in a fishing village. As a home, the tent turned out to be a white elephant, though its weight was real enough. Had it not been for all the metal parts, it would have been unnecessary to hire a launch. The normal thing to do was to pay the conventional single fare as a passenger, supplementing it with as much again, or any sum that seemed appropriate, on the terms of *noblesse oblige*—in comparison with the fishermen one was rich. As it was, after asking my permission because, after all, a contract was involved in hiring the whole launch, the captain took other passengers aboard. The best place to sit was the stern, the most stable position and away from the splash of the waves, so long as the weather stayed calm.

Sandals were not worn aboard the launch: everyone carried his footwear in his hand across the gangplank and put it down beside him on the deck. I was pressed to keep my shoes on, an obvious gesture of politeness to which the proper response seemed to be to insist on conforming to the custom. The same thing had happened on the one or two occasions when people had invited me into their houses in Kuwait. The two situations seemed so obviously similar that I took the

1. Jahra is a small town in northern Kuwait that serves as a customs and immigration centre.

symbolic parallel for granted: boarding a boat was like entering a house. But it was not quite so simple. Several months later, I learned that the deck was the 'mosque' of those sailing in a boat; it was the place where they prayed. As we crossed to the island, the summons to prayer was called and the sailors and passengers performed the prayer of mid-afternoon on the deck of the launch, using their head-cloths as prayer mats.<sup>2</sup>

The fishing launches of Failaka, of which this boat was one, were locally built craft equipped with diesel engines and lateen sails. They supplied fish for the Kuwait market, and this was why transport between Kuwait and the island was fairly regular. The launches were highly seaworthy, and had to be so because violent storms blew up in the Gulf in no time. In such storms, no one was so foolhardy as to put freshly to sea. These were times when fishing ceased and Failaka was cut off from Kuwait for days on end. That day, the sea was calm. One could, however, observe a distinct freshening of the weather once we had left the protection of the Bay of Kuwait. The sheltered anchorage of the bay provided an explanation of why old Kuwait had grown up and flourished in a barren land where even the drinking water was scarce and exceptionally brackish.

We landed at the village of Failaka towards sunset. The launch was pulled up on the beach and the sailors deposited my belongings above the tide-line. Except for the tent, there was not much: a couple of suitcases, two or three cardboard boxes, and a tin trunk and a packing-case that had arrived from England by sea. The packing-case contained two camp-chairs, a camp-table, a camp-bed, a pressure-lamp and a mosquito-net. In the cardboard boxes were a primus stove and some pots and pans I had bought in Kuwait. It was taken for granted that the luggage could be left unattended, and I went to see the governor. The metal parts of the tent were, in fact, to stay on the beach until I returned the tent to the oil company.

The room in which the governor conducted his business was completely old-fashioned—no administrative desk, no chairs, but low, wide cushions to sit on against the walls, and a floor covering of rugs. It was lit with a pressure-lamp. A radio was broadcasting an intoned recitation of the Koran—presumably from Iraq or Cairo, since Kuwait then had no radio station of its own. The governor smoked his clay hubble-bubble pipe and offered it round. Tea was served, followed by smoking incense. The incense lay on the top of glowing charcoal in a little clay pot, and one was supposed to inhale a little of the smoke and then pass the pot under one's beard, if one had a beard.

2. There follows a note to remind Peter to take up the symbolism: 'house is associated with women. Women are not associated with boats, except as occasional passengers. Only other association is inauspicious—the barren woman becomes fertile if she steps over the keel of a boat under construction at the price of the life of a sailor—usually the captain.' He continues, 'No one would even have allowed me to enter a mosque (which they did not like me to do anyway) with my shoes on. Palestinian Muslims were told to keep their shoes on. It was 'modern' to keep one's shoes on in a house.'

This was the governor's public room, his *dīwāniya*. In the context of administration, the word itself was interesting. It was a version, current in Kuwait and southern Iraq, of the Arabic word *dīwān*, existing also in Turkish and Persian as *divān*. Hence the English word 'divan'—the sofa made by putting a frame under the sort of sitting-cushions which furnished the governor's room. But the word was also connected with a verb meaning 'to write down'—hence *dīwān* and *divān* as words for a book of poetry, also familiar in English. Hence also, even in my Arabic pocket dictionary, the further meanings of *dīwān*: 'an office', 'a court of justice'. The *Dīwāniya* of the Governor of Failaka was, indeed, his office and his court of justice, as well as his public sitting-room.

The governor had two muscular ex-slaves as his attendants, men strong enough to enforce discipline. Failaka had no police or uniformed men of any kind. There were also present three Palestinian schoolmasters, the staff of the village school, who turned out to be the only people on the island who knew English. They were obviously there to interpret if necessary. By that time, I could manage more Arabic than the governor had expected, and we never had an interpreter again, but it was useful on that occasion to have their help because there were practical details to discuss. The headmaster explained that if I would like a house there was one I could rent at 70 rupees (£50) a month, and there was also a young man who had once been an assistant cook on a dhow who would be ready to work for me as a servant at a wage of 120 rupees a month. The headmaster added that the young man was married and would prefer to sleep at home, and so would I make this concession? The man was brought in for me to meet, and everything was settled. The governor lent me a metal bed, mattress and some matting for the floor, and I moved into the house.

I lived in Failaka village for three months of the winter and spring of 1954 and paid a further long visit in the summer of the following year. It was a village of about 3000 people, the only village on the island whose name it shared. There is probably no such thing as a 'simple' village, but at least Failaka was an easier place to get to know than Kuwait. For me, in three months, diverse experiences began to assume some vague consistency, a consistency sensed sooner than grasped intellectually. Various tentative ideas on all sorts of matters had to be cultivated and then, with regret, weeded out. A few began to grow healthily.

The house I had rented was a typical local house except for the size of the plot, which included a little date garden. From the outside, it consisted simply of a rectangular enclosure with walls high enough to prevent passers-by from seeing in. There were no windows in these walls; the whole house was oriented inwards. Inside, there were two single-storey rooms built against one outside wall, and a further, adjoining room built against another. The rest of the enclosure was a yard, into which the door of the house opened directly, with a few palms planted at the far end. The rooms did not intercommunicate; each had its separate door opening into the yard. The windows, looking out on the yard, had wooden shutters, but no glass. The walls of the house were of sun-dried mud brick, plastered over with

mud and straw. The roof beams were mangrove poles, which supported stones topped with a thick layer of dried mud to make a waterproof flat roof.

The reason why houses were surrounded by high walls and had no windows on the street was to preserve the privacy of the women. Modesty and propriety required women to avoid social contact with men to whom they were not closely related. A woman spent most of her time in her own house. When she went out into the street, she carried her seclusion with her: the walls of the house were replaced by a long black veil. The only work women did outside the house was to fetch water and to sweep the pathways around the house and keep them looking respectable. Women went out to the well together, chaperoning one another. They would also go out together to visit other women, usually relations, and sometimes to visit the graveyard and greet the family dead. Women prayed at home, not in the mosque.

The ground area of the house I had rented would have allowed for additional rooms to be built on so as to house a large family. The happiest domestic situation, people said, was to have the family all living together. Sons would bring their wives to live in their parents' house and bring up their children there. The father of the family would be master, making sure that the family lived religiously and honourably, and keeping control of expenditure. He had to be equitable, arranging that if one woman got a new dress the others got new dresses too, and not allowing any child to be specially favoured as against the rest. The mother would be mistress of the house, in charge of the cooking and domestic management, distributing the household tasks among the women and girls. Under the moral influence and affectionate discipline of the master and mistress of the house, the family would share its expenses and they would all look after one another.

My servant belonged to just such a happy family. Since I was providing part of their income, they seemed to treat me as a benefactor. In spite of purdah, I was able occasionally to talk to my servant's mother and even to meet his wife, whom the parents treated affectionately. At the end of my stay on the island, when everything was packed up to go on the launch, a storm blew up and lasted for two days. The father invited me to stay in their house, as if I were a member of the family, and there I learnt how family days began. Before dawn, the father came round calling, 'Get up and pray.' There were no greetings until we had washed our faces. Then came the greetings, 'Peace be upon you', 'And upon you be peace', 'Good morning.' My friends then performed the full ablutions (the ritual washing of their hands and forearms, feet and ankles, and faces) and individually prayed the dawn prayer, which ends, as do all the prayers, with the greeting of peace to the two guardian angels who constantly stand behind each person's shoulders.

The sight of a cane tucked away in a corner reminded me of a saying of the Prophet Muhammad familiar to everyone. He advised fathers to teach and exhort their children to pray and, if they were still dilatory, to chastise them. It seemed unlikely that the cane had been much, if ever, used in that house. They were sensible, dutiful, good-natured people between whom I never saw the slightest sign

of domestic friction. The young man was his parents' only child and the apple of their eye. He was the survivor of three sons, the other two having died in infancy. The first of the infant sons had been given the name of his dead grandfather, in order to commemorate him. When he died and another son was born, he too was given the same name, now commemorating both the grandfather and his dead brother. The second baby died and a third son was born. He again was given the same name, but the parents had now begun to wonder whether there was something inauspicious in the name as it stood. They consulted a religious teacher who wrote down a number of names on scraps of paper and, with a prayer, dropped them over the baby. One of them landed on the baby's body, a name that means 'manumitted'—not in this case from slavery, but from evils. He survived, and this was the name he was usually known by, though when he grew up he rather preferred to be known by his grandfather's name.

Religion recommended parents to get their children married young so as to keep them out of temptation. When he was about sixteen (people were never sure of their ages) his parents had found him a very pretty fourteen-year-old girl to marry. Such a young couple could not be expected to be mature enough to manage a household independently. The idea that they should live with the husband's parents made practical sense. One could also appreciate how, had there been more sons in the house, the children of the succeeding generation would be brought up in the habit of obeying their paternal uncles as well as their fathers, and so follow the traditional lines of agnatic authority. Their maternal uncles, affectionate and influential as they might be, could not demand obedience. They would be living elsewhere, authoritative and responsible in their own households.

So far, the young couple had no children—indeed, in early stages, such young marriages often have more to do with companionship and the growth of intimacy than with procreation. The family did, however, have one extra member, an orphan nephew of the father's who had come from abroad. He worked with the father as a builder. Thus, when work was available, there were three wage-earners to produce the family income in a family of five—some insurance, among poor people, against accident, sickness, or the days of unemployment.

Not all families were so happy. An old widower invited me home. I knew him because his son-in-law supplied me with water—a lowly and not very manly job. As we sat talking in the main room, my host began by apologizing: 'Please excuse this bedouin hovel of a home,' he said, 'it is all falling down.' The old man did not, however, lack patronage. He prided himself on the regard shown him by the shaikhs, for whom he had worked. He hunted under the bed and brought out a little raffia fan on a stick bearing the Arabic greeting, 'Prosper every day.' It was a keepsake the ruler had given him after a visit abroad. In a while we heard tea glasses being discreetly rattled outside the doorway by a woman, presumably his daughter, who was standing there almost completely out of sight and fully veiled. Having brought in the tea tray, the host hunted under the bed again for a tin of cake. The son-in-law joined us and did the pouring, but as a

junior, though perhaps thirty-five, he only spoke when spoken to. The household was strict.

Like his house, the old man was getting frail. His cloak of dignity had worn threadbare: unhappiness showed through, and with it the lack of forbearance whereby some of his trouble might have been avoided. He discussed 'life' and 'the world' philosophically, but when he addressed his son-in-law a petulant tone intruded. The old man talked about his son, who was not present. He had got him a wife, but she was no good in the house. The father had been dissatisfied, and the son had divorced her. He had got him another wife, and the same thing had happened again—it was difficult nowadays to find a good wife. He had found him a third wife, this time a very young girl whom he had expected to be manageable. She was the worst of the lot. He spoke of her in a calm, measured voice, but with a vocabulary quite unrelenting. She had not only been lazy and disobedient, but feckless into the bargain. He had had a terrible time with her. The last straw was when she forgot to turn off the tap of the paraffin tank and he found the paraffin all trickling away in the yard. 'What a waste! How could she be so feckless unless she was trying to be annoying?' When he criticized her, she just left. He wouldn't have minded, by that time, only his son left with her. They now lived in Kuwait and didn't even visit him. 'The world is like that,' he reflected, 'everything passes away.'

Whatever I saw of a rural tragedy here, reminiscent of some of the stories in Crabbe's poems, it was not my place to do more than hint at a tragic flaw. I wondered what the governor made of it all, and asked him. The governor expressed his opinion with inflexible Kuwaiti common sense—of course he was an old man. Being old, he ought to be wise enough to understand what life is like. A man ought to look after his daughter-in-law, and a son ought to stand up for his wife—if need be, even against his father. Otherwise, this sort of thing would happen: divorces would go on for a while, but sooner or later a girl would turn up who was strong enough to get her own way and make her husband leave home. No doubt it was a sad situation, but whose fault was it?

As the low rent of my house suggested, little of Kuwait's prosperity had so far rubbed off on Failaka. There were no public works: the only roads and paths were those worn by people's feet. Private house construction and repairs only provided employment for four or five builders, and that, spasmodically. Apart from the Palestinian schoolteachers, Failaka had no modern services, whether benevolent or intrusive—no clinic or doctor, no police or customs officers. The villagers fetched their own water from the wells. They cooked on primus stoves and lit their houses with hurricane- or pressure-lamps. At night, a simple lamp raised on a mast guided the fishing boats to shore, while one could see in the sky the diffused glow of oil gas being burnt off on the distant mainland.

I heard no suggestion that Failaka was being neglected by the government. Things were better than they had been. Those who had gone on raids on behalf of the great Shaikh Mubarak at the turn of the century had soon realized that his principle for dividing the spoils of battle was very simple: 'The great is for the

great, the middling is for the great, the small is for the great, and what is left over is for you.' The present ruler was generous and enlightened: Failaka's turn would come. People in Failaka certainly took it for granted that they had a right to benefit from the wealth Kuwait's oil produced, but the modern idea of 'the people' demanding their rightful share in the division of the national wealth was not familiar among the islanders—they were not 'the people' (*al-sha'b*) but 'the people of Failaka' (*ahl Failaka*—a totally different expression). Even for the future, no one seemed to have the unrealistic dream of a life of ease supported on oil royalties. What people hoped for was well-paid work. To demonstrate that he was not illiterate like most (he was certainly more naïve), a fisherman laboriously scrawled down the question, 'Is there oil on Failaka?' Why else should an Englishman have come there, and might he not tell a literate man the secret he had concealed from the others? If Failaka turned out to have oil too, then the people would have work at home without having to cross to Kuwait.

Kuwait had first come into being, on its inhospitable site, in the eighteenth century. Failaka could have been a practicable place for habitation ever since people had boats. In a predominantly barren area, it had a good water supply, plenty of fishing, and the security of being an island. The only archaeological evidence of earlier habitation then known was a Greek inscription found early in the century. There were, however, near the village, two long, regular mounds that looked, even to my inexperienced eye, like tumuli that would interest an archaeologist, and there was also a shrine a few hundred yards along the sea-shore. The twin mounds were called Sa'd and Sa'id, and the shrine was called Al-Khidr. Al-Khidr, 'The Green One', appears in the Koran as a holy personage, more angelic than human, who instructed the prophet Moses in the ways of divine providence. Sa'ad and Sa'id were said locally to be the graves of holy men, true Muslims from the early days of the world, when human beings were of vast size.

It was disappointing for an anthropologist, looking for something to discover, to find no significant cult connected with these places, nothing which adapted the transcendent religion to the particularities of local life. There was one old woman nicknamed 'Mother Khidr' who regularly visited the shrine and the old graveyard nearby, and though the roof had been broken down there were signs that a little incense had been burnt at the shrine subsequently. But that was all. As for the mounds, all that was said was that there were many holy men buried in Failaka, and that was why the island had no snakes. One or two people said the shrine of the Green One had been broken down because it fell under suspicion of being a place for immoral assignations when a youth and a woman were seen there together at night, though, in fact, it turned out to have been just a woman taking her sick son there in the hope of a cure. The governor said this was nonsense. Some people from the Iranian coast had been visiting the shrine, simple-minded, superstitious people as they were, but such behaviour ultimately amounted to idolatry and could not be allowed to go on. He had discussed the problem with one of the shaikhs, and they had simply taken some men and broken down the

shrine. If anyone (except, perhaps, Mother Khidr, whom I could not talk to because she was a woman) had any strong objections, I never heard of it.

There was one detail in which quite a number of the local people could be thought to disregard strict Islamic orthodoxy, though they preferred not to think so themselves. This was *zār*, the visitation of spirits. I had heard a little about *zār* from the islanders, but first came across it in practice when a young man I knew well was talking to another about the latter's personal problems, which seemed to be causing him some psychological strain. Judging by what I overheard of the conversation, carried on in low voices at the far end of my kitchen, the main speaker was becoming increasingly tactless, and the other young man was beginning to show signs of acute mental distress, to a point when I began to think I ought to intervene. At that moment, the distressed man, who was sitting on the floor, fainted and fell over. I started to interfere, but the man responsible told me not to be alarmed, everything was all right. In a minute or two the other one came round and rubbed his eyes, and my friend greeted him, 'Peace be upon you.' He went away, a little dazed but much calmer.

My friend explained that he himself was one of the practitioners of *zār* on the island. According to Islamic teaching, there are many spirits in the world, spirits originally created by God from fire. Some are Muslims, and are usually benevolent. Others are malevolent and dangerous, but it is with God alone that human beings should take refuge against them. According to *zār* beliefs, spirits 'visit' human beings and get into their heads. They cause trouble and have to be placated. *Zār* practitioners in Failaka would give the spirit incense to smell through the nose of the sufferer, who had gone into a state of trance after the lengthy singing, to the accompaniment of tambourines, of Islamic songs such as:

Repentance Lord, repentance Lord,  
For my fault and sin,  
Lord God, I repent.  
The drinker of [forbidden] wine,  
Got drunk but sobers up.  
Lord God, I repent.  
Now we are men of God.

Speaking with the sufferer's tongue, the spirit would ask for things—a ring for the sufferer to wear, sometimes the sacrifice of an animal, whose blood the spirit would drink through the sufferer's mouth. The drinking of blood is, of course, absolutely forbidden to Muslims, but it was not the Muslim sufferer but the spirit visitor who was supposed to be drinking it. In trying to work out the logical status of the act of drinking blood, I asked: 'Could you give the spirit the blood of a donkey?', a silly question which got the answer it deserved: 'Would *you* drink the blood of a donkey?' As far as I could discover, people mainly had recourse to *zār* in cases which suggested emotional and psychological disturbance, though one case was of terminal cancer and another was of a stroke. Far from being substitute or alternative religion, *zār* in Failaka, for those who had anything to do with it,

was more like superstitious folk medicine. The more literate and businesslike local people, such as the governor, certainly spoke of it as a superstition, *khurāfa*, and hence regrettable—but harmless as compared, for example, with idolatry. Spirit healers were not setting up equals with God. It would have been unthinkable to permit large public displays of spirit healing, such as I witnessed in the Afro-Arab circumstances of Zanzibar a few years later, but as long as it was practised discreetly in the home it was people's private business and no one interfered. Later, in another part of the Gulf, I found it was possible even for the sceptics to turn to spirit healing in circumstances of medical desperation when all else failed, practising a sort of mad empiricism as we all might.

The same sort of people were sceptically tolerant of the common practice of protecting kitchen gardens from the evil eye by hanging a few donkey skulls on the fence. They shared the opinion of the Persian poet Fariduddin 'Attar who wrote, 'You must have been born with ass's brains to hang up this ass's skull. This ass, when living, could not ward off the stick. How can it ward off the evil eye, when dead?' In the anthropology of that time, the word 'superstition' was considered outmoded, even obscurantist, and on the whole for good reason, but the word in Arabic had exactly the same meaning, and its use was part of the ethnography of the Gulf. It distinguished what one might call 'notions' from 'beliefs', just as in England it distinguishes the notion that it is dangerous to walk under a ladder from beliefs of a theological kind. It was thus that idolatry fell into a different category. In Islamic terms, many regarded such superstitious behaviour, whether of spirit healing or hanging up donkeys' skulls as, strictly speaking, 'disapproved' (*makrūh*), but idolatry was 'forbidden' (*ḥarām*) and indeed as forbidden as anything could be.

Religion in Failaka did not deviate from the 'straight path' in which people ask to be led every day as they repeat the opening prayer of the Koran. To worship God and obey Him were the essential duties of mankind. The One God was creator of all, and except for His Word, the Koran, everything else was created. God had sent many prophets to mankind from Adam onwards, including Jesus and those whom Christians regard as prophets of the Old Testament. They were Muslims. Their prophetic messages, as transmitted in the Christian and Jewish scriptures, have been corrupted by priests and rabbis. The final and greatest of the prophets was Muhammad, to whom the Koran was revealed and who was able to interpret God's will.

There had been no old Christian or Jewish minorities in Kuwait or the other shaikhdoms of the Gulf, as there were in so many Middle Eastern countries, and so people in Failaka were only familiar with these religions as mentioned in Islamic teaching. Some were mildly inquisitive about whether Christians prayed or fasted. My explanations convinced them to the contrary since prayer, *al-ṣalah*, required prostrations (otherwise it was only 'intercession', *du'a*), and a fast in which people ate and drank was no fast. One thing that did impress several people, indeed moved them, was the wording of the Christian marriage service—'for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health...till

death do us part'. The Prophet said that, of all the things that Islam allowed, divorce was the most disapproved. Christians and Jews are to be tolerated in Islam, and people in Failaka were tolerant, though they did sometimes suggest that I was being unreasonable in not obeying God to the point of becoming a Muslim myself. One homely remark indicated the construction placed on obedience, though it might have surprised the more theologically minded: 'How can you be a Christian? How can you claim that you can obey God without obeying the Prophet Muhammad? It is like saying you obey your father and don't obey your (paternal) uncle.'

One elderly man held religious instruction for adults every morning. He encouraged me to attend, perhaps in the hope that if God decreed that I should become a Muslim he would be the instrument of my conversion. His efforts at proselytism, if such they were, were tactful and indirect. I simply noticed how frequently he reverted to Islamic teachings about Jesus: after Muhammad, the greatest of the Islamic prophets; the Word proceeding from God, but still created by God; whom God saved from crucifixion by substituting a likeness of him; and who shall return at the end of the world and kill Al-Dajjal, 'the Imposter' (who in Christianity is called Antichrist). These doctrines are all derived directly from the Koran. And, as the teacher frequently mentioned, the Koran says of Christians that of all men they are 'the most inclinable to entertain friendship for the Muslims'. The teacher was too kindly to mention in my presence what was said by the great classical commentator Al-Baidawi (I quote from the notes of George Sale to his own translation of the Koran, which I had taken with me):

They add that Jesus will arrive at Jerusalem at the time of the morning prayer, that he shall perform his devotions after the Mohammedan institution, and officiate instead of the Imam, who shall give place to him; that he will break down the cross, and destroy the churches of the Christians, of whom he will make a general slaughter, excepting only such as shall profess Islam, &c.

Indeed, in the whole period I spent in the Gulf, no one whatsoever mentioned to me the ultimate destiny of Christians who failed to convert. More than once, the teacher quoted from the Koran the miraculous speech of the infant Jesus from the cradle, defending the Virgin Mary from the accusations of the people. Here in his very own words, unchanged by human transmission, was the irrefutable proof of what Jesus proclaimed himself to be:

Verily I am the servant of God; he hath given me the book of the gospel, and hath appointed me a prophet. And he hath made me blessed, wheresoever I shall be; and hath commanded me to observe prayer, and to give alms so long as I shall live; and he hath made me dutiful towards my mother, and hath not made me proud, or unhappy. And peace be upon me the day whereon I was born, and the day whereon I shall die, and the day whereon I shall be raised to life.

Far from living off his religion, the teacher spent his own money on it. About twenty men would usually attend his instruction; and towards the end of the proceedings the teacher provided us all with a simple breakfast at his own expense—an act of charity as much as hospitality. His method of teaching was to read from a classical book, adding his own commentary. He never wandered off into pedantic niceties. His main concern obviously was that people should lead good lives, and his commentary was mostly taken up with the exposition and reiteration of the duties of Muslims. His audience was illiterate and he was entirely patient with the simplest of questions, as when one man, after the teacher had spoken at some length about the *ansar* ('helpers' of the Prophet) asked whether they were Muslims, a question not all that different from asking whether the apostles were Christians. This was not a school: he was not teaching about Islam as a matter of information but teaching Islam as a religion.

During the breakfast, when conversation was general, people sometimes raised problems of their own. One day, two brothers who were having a family quarrel brought the matter up at a meeting. In such a situation, they ought first to have turned for guidance to the older generation of their family, for family matters were very private. But the brothers were middle-aged men and no one from the older generation survived. In a more impersonal fashion, the teacher took their place. He discussed the principles of behaviour and justice raised by the quarrel, quoting what God had prescribed and the Prophet had said in his reported sayings, and gave a religious adjudication. Here, in 'commanding what is right and forbidding what is wrong', he was performing one of the religious duties incumbent on all Muslims. He was also, in so far as he was able, making peace, a further religious act. Moreover, that the peace should be between brothers had an intense social relevance. Of the many stories that were read out to us, the one which emotionally moved the audience was that of Joseph. When we reached the description of how Joseph was reunited with his father and forgave his brothers for betraying him and casting him into the well, two or three old fishermen were reduced to tears.

The thing that struck me most in these meetings was the idea of the prophet Muhammad as the model of all human virtue, the most perfect of all men, the Chosen One whose face was clothed in the light of the Throne of God. At school, in so far as I had heard or read—say in Walter Scott's *The Talisman*—of the Muslims of the past, it had been in the context of war, and in that context the Muslims were not 'us' and their victories were not 'ours'. The time was far ahead when a high proportion of children in a classroom in Yorkshire might be of Muslim Pakistani origin. Since the World War that was going on at the time was that of 1939 and not 1914, we were no schoolboy jingoists. Nevertheless, as the victory of Wellington over Napoleon had distinctly been 'our' victory—a small part of our identity—so the Battle of Tours<sup>3</sup> had been more 'our' victory than

3. Peter's note to this reads: 'The victory of Charles Martel in AD 732 against Muslims advancing from Spain, but for which, Gibbon imagined, Islam would have been taught in the universities of Paris and Oxford.'

otherwise. At Cambridge, where one learnt about the early Islamic conquests at the same time as learning about the Islamic religion, militant Islam had still been in the forefront of the mind. Some recent events had matched it. In one of those arguments at Cambridge that so often passed for conversation, one Pakistani nationalist had said: 'I don't pray, I don't fast, I drink alcohol, but when I was fighting the Indians in Kashmir, I knew that if I was killed I should go straight to heaven.' In Islam, God has many names, including 'the Conqueror', but the names that appear in the opening prayer of the Koran and are constantly repeated in everyday life are 'the Merciful, the Compassionate'. Here in Failaka, consonant with the supreme mercy of God, the mercifulness of the Prophet was a dominant religious concept.

During the religious instructions, the teacher was reading from a book entitled *Narratives of the Prophets*, an old, popular account of the prophets of Islam before Muhammad. I had read similar books in Cambridge, and so in manner and content it was no surprise. Nevertheless, hearing it read out as the only outsider in a group of believers was a markedly different experience. It formed a different perspective of the imagination. For example, in Cambridge, when I read attacks upon idolatry, the vicariousness of comparative religion had dominated the perspective—it was something taken for granted in the community in which I lived. In the community of Failaka, comparative religion was unheard of, whereas idolatry was real sin, the setting up of equals with God. Through the mouths of idols, though no one had ever seen an idol, the devil and evil spirits spoke to lead men astray. Maintained as a private idea, and one that could not be discussed, comparative religion could not be forgotten, but it became a more distant part of the landscape. Only thus could vicariousness be included in a context that itself opposed it.

*Narrative of the Prophets* included numerous quotations from the Koran, but the bulk of the book was made up of apocryphal detail. The following is a representative passage taken from the story of Jacob and Joseph after Joseph has been made away with by his brothers:

And it is said that the angel of Death visited Jacob, and when Jacob saw him the angel said: 'Peace be upon you, O you who seethe with anger.' And Jacob's skin crawled and he trembled with fear as he returned the greeting. Then he said to him, 'Who are you, and who has let you into this house, when I have locked myself in so that no one can disturb me while I complain to God of my grief?' And he replied, 'O prophet of God, I am he who makes orphans and widowers and he who separates companions.' And Jacob said, 'You, then, are the Angel of Death.' He replied, 'I am he.' And Jacob said, 'O Angel of Death, I conjure you to tell me, when a man is eaten by beasts of prey, do you seize his soul?' He replied, 'I do.' And he asked him, 'Do you seize souls all together or separately, one by one?' He replied, 'I seize them one by one.' And Jacob asked him, 'And is one of the souls that has passed before you the soul of Joseph?' He replied, 'No.' Then Jacob asked him, 'Do you come to visit me or to call me?' He replied, 'O prophet of God, I have come only to greet you in peace, since God,

may He be exalted, will not cause you to die until he has brought you and Joseph together.'

This narrative read as an account of what actually happened. Its immediacy was enormously enhanced when read out among men every one of whom expected his own life to end when the Angel of Death, a personal presence, came to demand his soul; and who expected shortly afterwards to be questioned about his faith by two more angels, both of whose names mean 'Abominable', as he lay in the grave, with his shroud open over his ear. It was the atmosphere of literal belief that made the difference. When one knew and internally accepted the people like oneself, one was at least half way to accepting their imagination. Such is the effect of social assimilation.

Without ostensibly raising them, the book also answered many questions of how and why, such as might occur to any enquiring mind. Why did God visit Jacob with the tribulation of losing his son Joseph? The Angel of Death asks Jacob whether he wishes to know, and then reminds him of the precise year and the precise day on which he bought a slave girl and callously separated her from her parents. According to the book, however, others, who do not refer to a story about the angel, report a different reason: Jacob had owned a cow that bore a calf, and, without pity, he had slaughtered the calf before the eyes of its mother, who stood there lowing with grief. By the time I lived in Failaka, it would have been illegal and impossible for anyone there to buy a slave girl; but every man slaughtered an animal from time to time. As he did so, he would proclaim the name of God, saying, 'God is most great: in the name of God', but he would omit the attributes that usually follow, 'the Merciful, the Compassionate' because these were not appropriate to the act. And before slaughtering it, he would offer it water to drink.

Thus, in the answers to unasked questions, the *Narratives*, like many other texts of religious learning, produced examples that taught people what was pleasing and displeasing to God, and contributed to a moral consensus. With the theme of mercy also went the theme of justice. The Koran states that when Benjamin was accused of stealing the cup that his brother Joseph had put into his sack, the other brothers said, 'If Benjamin be guilty of theft, his brother [Joseph] hath also been guilty of theft heretofore.' Though the prophets, including Joseph, had human faults, could a prophet be guilty of such a crime as theft? And yet, the Koran does not say that the brothers were lying. According to the *Narratives*, some authorities say that Joseph had once stolen an egg from the family house to give to a beggar (hence, his act was not theft but an act of charity). But others say that his mother, who was a Muslim, had told him to steal a golden idol belonging to her brother and break it. Joseph did so and cast the idol away in the street. (This was no theft, but opposition to idolatry—nor did Joseph even keep the gold.)

All in all, the narratives read out were so elaborate and circumstantial as to sound like history, a history in which God frequently spoke to his prophets and angels were constant visitors to men. This was the only history the audience had, the Failaka school being so new, except for memories of a recent period in Kuwait

and the Gulf extending, perhaps, for seventy years. It seemed that the shortness of the secular folk memory brought the prophetic past much closer. In one respect, it drew close to contemporary events. This was in respect of Israel. Since the prophets were Muslims, the neglect or rejection of their message by the Jews appeared as a lengthy sequence of offences against Islam. This was entirely consistent with what is stated in the Koran.

The teacher did occasionally remark on some of the situations of the modern world, commenting on the atheistical nature of communism or the dispossession and flight of the Arab refugees from Palestine in the war of 1948. His comments steered clear of the militant or political sides of Islam. In the context of Palestine, he said that the Palestinian Arabs should all fulfil their duties of fasting, prayer and the like, which too many must have neglected, in the hope that God would restore their land to them. He did not speak of holy war, *jihād*. One subject he never touched on was political issues in Kuwait. This may have been out of choice, but was possibly also out of prudence. Willing as they may sometimes have been to take notice of public opinion, the shaikhs would not countenance any religious 'leadership' that could offer an alternative to their own authority. Not being a Muslim, I could not without scandal attend the Friday prayer in the mosques, but I gathered that the Friday sermons were all read out of books, some so old that they included a prayer for the Sultan 'Abd al-Hamid of Turkey as Caliph. It was said in explanation that no local man was considered learned enough to write a Friday sermon of his own.

Those who attended the religious instruction were not exceptionally pious or virtuous men, any more than were the other people of Failaka. Nor were they revivalists. When I joined them as they mended their fishing nets along the sea-shore, they were discussing, joking, or complaining about secular affairs, not talking about the prophets, or the angels, or the religious law. They were normal, everyday people. In some matters where mercy might have been expected, they were far from tears: they said that if a girl committed fornication and lost the family honour, it was right for her father or brother to kill her and throw her body into the sea. This was a fishing community: people lived a hard life and they spent what little money they had on themselves and their families. But one of the necessities was to perform religious duties—to pray five times a day, to fast, to give away something in the way of alms, and to try to repent fully of one's sins. Some men in Failaka had learnt, as children, to read the Koran at the mosque school, but apart from that, the sort of teaching I have described had been the only education available until the opening of the modern school, staffed by Palestinian teachers.

Educational opportunity was no new idea in the State of Kuwait. On one of my occasional visits there from Failaka, I learnt that the first school with a claim to modernity had been founded when pearl fishing still flourished and long before oil came on the scene. It had been set up, for practical reasons, by merchants, who circumvented the conservative opposition of some of the shaikhs by naming it the Mubarakiya School, in commemoration of the autocratic Shaikh Mubarak. One

of its early teachers was the remarkable Egyptian expatriate, Shaikh Hafiz Wahba, later to become Minister of Education in Saudi Arabia, and subsequently Saudi Arabian ambassador in London. In Failaka, elementary, modern education at least offered boys the opportunity of qualifying to be clerks, of being better paid and more secure, and of spending their nights comfortably at home rather than laboriously and dangerously at sea. For the clever ones, if their fathers agreed, there was plenty of government money available to send them later to secondary schools and perhaps to the university of Cairo or of some other foreign metropolis.

The teaching in the new school was, necessarily, elementary, and did not include current affairs. I never heard whether the teachers mentioned their own opinions and experiences in class—certainly, had they been known to be persistently introducing their opinions about politics into the lessons, they would not have lasted long. As the proverb said, 'Strangers have to behave themselves.' Strangers they were, and for them Failaka was a 'backward' place as compared with Palestine. In their terms, even the religious teacher was not a well-educated man. Had they ever attended his instruction, they would have been more critical than I felt like being when he persisted in reading out the Arabic word for 'angel' (*malak*) as the word for 'king' (*malik*). But, in any case, the apocryphal part of the *Narratives of the Prophets* was not their sort of Islam. Except for alcohol, which they did not drink, they were distinctly closer to the Pakistani militant I had known in Cambridge than to the religious teacher who was now their neighbour. There was a war behind them—and another war ahead. It was now 1954, six years after the first war in Palestine and only two years before the Suez war. During the latter, Kuwait had huge demonstrations in support of Egypt, and the representatives of the Foreign Office, hitherto on good terms with the Kuwaitis, suddenly found themselves ostracised, while further down the Gulf, in the less stable circumstances that then prevailed in Bahrain, there were riots in which the Christian church was burnt down. Whatever the teachers may have kept to themselves in the classroom in 1954, they cannot have needed to conceal in 1956.

## THE POLITICS AND PHILOSOPHICAL GENEALOGY OF EVANS-PRITCHARD'S *THE NUER*

TONY FREE

IN an earlier article (Free 1990), I noted how contemporary views of anthropology as writing—exemplified in Clifford and Marcus's *Writing Culture* (1986) and Geertz's *Works and Lives* (1988)—have tended to ignore the relation between text(s) and world(s). When they do refer to any world it is a unitary, monolithic one: for example, Geertz deals in *Works and Lives* with Evans-Pritchard's work as the outcome of the world of the Oxbridge common room, while Rosaldo in his essay in *Writing Culture* deals with Evans-Pritchard's *The Nuer* as a product solely of colonial domination. Both gloss over the political dimension of Evans-Pritchard's work—Geertz, by denying any politics, and Rosaldo, by stereotyping Evans-Pritchard's political position as that of a colonial dominator. Both thus ignore the political divisions within the colonial world and Evans-Pritchard's position within it. Furthermore, although many of the essays in *Writing Culture*

I am grateful to Michael Gilson and Godfrey Lienhardt for reading drafts of this article. It was written, along with Free 1990, in October-December 1988, and no attempt has been made in either article to deal with any article or book published since then. Some additions and afterthoughts have been made in the footnotes. Page references are to *The Nuer* (Evans-Pritchard 1940) unless otherwise indicated.

I have restricted myself to a critical appraisal of Evans-Pritchard's recent critics. The article can thus be seen as a defence of Evans-Pritchard. It should not, however, be seen as a piece of pure 'ancestor worship'. For an earlier article critical of Evans-Pritchard's Nuer ethnography, see Free 1988.

do make substantial reference to philosophical writing, they avoid any mention of the specific philosophical genealogies of any particular works. In dealing with *The Nuer*, the essays of both Marie Louise Pratt and Renato Rosaldo avoid any reference to philosophy, restricting themselves to the literary aspects of written texts. Similarly, in *Works and Lives*, Geertz (1988: 8) sees anthropology as simply situated within or between a dichotomy of 'literary' and 'scientific' discourses. The importance of specifically philosophical aspects of and background to anthropological texts is ignored. It is as if this philosophical background and philosophical writing in general have been moved from a form of writing into oblivion, as an irrelevant and minor subtype of literature.

Wendy James has pointed out (1973: 49) that Evans-Pritchard's *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica* was 'a book of unusually committed characters...in its treatment of an anti-colonialist national movement and its clearly anti-Fascist sympathies'. Evans-Pritchard's political position was far from being that of an apologist for colonialism, or for that matter that of a typical representative of Oxbridge England. Here I shall attempt to uncover the highly interrelated philosophical genealogies and political positions inherent in Evans-Pritchard's best known text, *The Nuer*. In so doing I shall attempt to point to the flaws and omissions that are necessarily aspects of any purely literary approach.

### 1. *The Explicit Absence of Philosophy*

Perhaps the fundamental complication in dealing with the philosophical background of *The Nuer* is Evans-Pritchard's attitude towards the citation of other texts. Pitt-Rivers points to this in the preface to the second edition of his *The People of the Sierra* (1971). Scandalized by the request of his publisher to cut out the 'erudition', Pitt-Rivers went to consult his teacher: 'Professor Evans-Pritchard...reassured me that such scholarly trappings are mainly either mystifying or redundant: the reader who is not much acquainted with the theories invoked is not much enlightened by the references to them, and he who is should be able to see their relevance for himself' (Pitt-Rivers 1971: xi). Thus it would not be surprising to find seemingly innocuous statements in *The Nuer* that have a reference back to philosophical, sociological or anthropological writings. But in looking for such back-references one can never be sure when one is reading a reference into the text that was not originally intended. Thus the following may be regarded as broad speculative interpretations.

Let us start our mystification by looking at a few seemingly innocuous sentences quoted by Rosaldo (1986: 94) as 'speaking of absences rather than presences', as showing that 'the Nuer lack the obvious (to a Western eye) institutions of political order':

The Nuer cannot be said to be stratified into classes. (p. 7)

Indeed, the Nuer have no government, and their state might be described as an ordered anarchy. Likewise they lack law, if we understand by this term judgements delivered by an independent and impartial authority which has, also, power to enforce its decisions. (pp. 5-6)

The lack of governmental organs among the Nuer, the absence of legal institutions, of developed leadership and, generally, of organized political life is remarkable. (p. 181)

The sentence in *The Nuer* that immediately precedes the second quotation above is: 'He [the leopard-skin chief] is a sacred person without political authority' (p. 5). Just as such statements concerning the lack of the leopard-skin chief's juridical authority can be traced to an empirical negation of the applicability of the Durkheimian conception of moral authority (see Free 1988: 74), statements concerning the lack of law or of legal institutions can be traced to an empirical rejection of Durkheim's characterization of 'segmentary', 'mechanical' societies as giving rise to 'repressive law'.

Similarly, the statement concerning social class conjures up the first sentence of *The Communist Manifesto*: 'The history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggle' (Marx and Engels 1967 [1848]: 79) of which it is a direct contradiction and, moreover, Engels' footnote to that sentence (ibid.) which points to the existence of primitive communist societies.

## 2. *Rousseau and the Pastoral*

A central theme of Rosaldo's essay in *Writing Culture* is that of 'the pastoral': *The Nuer* is seen as written in 'the pastoral mode'. (This is a theme to which Clifford returns in his essay in the same volume where he claims (1986: 113) that salvage anthropology is 'appropriately located within a long Western tradition of pastoral'.) It would be largely fruitless to enter into a definitional argument concerning the appropriateness of the word 'pastoral'. A more important question than what pastoral means is what the usage of the term does or enables one to do in this specific argument. Nevertheless, Raymond Williams, whose *The Country and the City* (1980) is cited by Clifford as an authoritative work on the pastoral, points to 'the confusion that surrounds the whole question of "pastoral"' (ibid.: 14) and says that 'the first problem of definition, a persistent problem of form, is the question of pastoral, of what is known as pastoral' (ibid.: 12). However, these definitional problems do not seem to daunt the writers of culture from writing of 'the pastoral mode', or from continuing to extend its usage from poetry to anthropological writing. What do they achieve by this?

Aside from the derogatory connotations of 'pastoral' for the post-romantic—though possibly not post-modern—mind, the use of the word 'pastoral' to refer to *The Nuer* creates a thread of continuity, and obscures any discontinuity, from that book back via the eighteenth century to Virgil and Hesiod. Williams's *The Country and the City* is partially directed against 'the bluff' of such 'confident glossing and glozing of the reference back' (Williams 1980: 18-19), against 'the long Western tradition of the pastoral' (Clifford 1986: 113) within which Clifford locates salvage anthropology and Rosaldo locates *The Nuer*. *The Country and the City* largely concerns changes in 'the structures of feeling' (Williams 1980: 12) or the evolution of an eventual structure of feeling in the historical social relationship(s) between country and city, rather than 'a "structure of feeling"' as Clifford (1986: 112) quotes Williams (1980: 12). Indeed, Williams states—of the regressive series of retrospective writings concerning the country that he refers to—that: 'Old England, settlement, the rural virtues—all these, in fact, mean different things at different times and quite different values are being brought to question. We shall need precise analysis of each kind of retrospect, as it comes' (ibid.).

Furthermore, the chapter dealing explicitly with 'pastoral' in *The Country and the City* is entitled 'Pastoral and Counter-Pastoral' and points to William Crabbe's rejection of the 'neo-classic pastoral' (ibid.: 13-34). Moreover, the pastoral is seen in terms of the city and the country, rather than all aspects of the relationships between the country and the city being subsumable under the label 'pastoral'. Even if there had been no appeal to the authority of Williams by Clifford, these rather salient points would have to be considered as they demonstrate considerable differences, even within 'literature', between writing concerning the country in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries and that of the twentieth, let alone between the earlier literature and twentieth-century ethnographic writing.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, differences in what is called 'pastoral', which may range from a eulogy of the country to the satirical or ironic critique of the writer's own society, are ignored in the application of a single term.

Nevertheless, once Rosaldo has extended the usage of the word 'pastoral' to cover *The Nuer* and Le Roy Ladurie's *Montaillou* (1978), he writes:

Yet a question remains. Why use the literary pastoral to represent, presumably in a documentary rather than a fictional mode, the lives of actual shepherds? The pastoral mode, after all, derives from the court, and its shepherds usually turn out to have been royally dressed in rustic garb. As a literary mode, it stands far removed either from late medieval French shepherds or contemporary Nilotic cattle herders. Instead it embodies a distinctive sense of courtesy that Kenneth Burke

1. Such 'appeals to authority' are one of the most common tropes in anthropological, academic and indeed everyday discourse. Their usage merges with the operations of pedagogic authority within academia and appeals to the authority of academia outside of it—the television expert, for example.

has aptly characterised as 'the rhetoric of courtship between contrasted social classes'... In earlier literary epochs this courtship occurred between nobles and commoners, lords and vassals, and masters and servants. The displaced modern pastoral analogously emerges in interactions between town and country, middle class and working class, and colonizer and colonized. (Rosaldo 1986: 96)

Even if we were to accept that *The Nuer* is derived from the eighteenth-century pastoral—Rosaldo points (ibid.: 95) only to those few statements about the courageous, generous, democratic, egalitarian and independent qualities of Nuer character to support his assertion that *The Nuer* is written in the pastoral mode—we need not accept that this derivation entails an embodiment, that a historical link involves any identity of substance, or hypostatized essence. Nor do we have to accept that 'the pastoral mode' is an embodiment of 'the rhetoric of courtship between contrasted classes'. Williams (1980: 17) points to the fact that Virgil, whose poetry can perhaps be seen as strictly pastoral in an original, classical sense, was the son of a smallholder who wrote to protect the land and its customary farmers from confiscation.

If we look for a philosophical reference-point for Evans-Pritchard's so-called pastoral statements about Nuer character, one candidate is what has become known as Rousseau's 'noble savage'. One could, perhaps, see Rousseau's philosophy as pastoral in some aspects, but any association with Marie Antoinette's shepherdess games might have been lost on him as he moved from house to house, on the run from her father-in-law's and husband's secret police.

Let us look in more detail, then, at the quotations concerning the Nuer 'character' cited by Rosaldo as evidence for the 'pastoral' nature of *The Nuer*, to see exactly of whom or of what mode of writing they are reminiscent. Rosaldo (1986: 95) quotes a number of statements said to display the 'pastoral mode':

Such a life nurtures the qualities of the shepherd—courage, love of fighting, and contempt of hunger and hardship—rather than shapes the industrious character of the peasant. (p. 26)

Some outstanding traits in Nuer character may be said to be consistent with their low technology and scanty food-supply.... The qualities which have been mentioned, courage, generosity, patience, pride, loyalty, stubbornness, and independence, are the virtues the Nuer themselves extol, and these values can be shown to be very appropriate to their simple mode of life and to the simple set of social relations it engenders. (p. 90)

The ordered anarchy in which they live accords well with their character, for it is impossible to live among Nuer and conceive of rulers ruling over them.

The Nuer is a product of hard and egalitarian upbringing, is deeply democratic and easily roused to violence. His turbulent spirit finds any restraint irksome and no man recognizes a superior. (p. 181)

First, we should note that there are other statements that do not fit so easily into the 'pastoral mode', such as Evans-Pritchard's characterization of the Nuer as 'the war-like Nuer' (p. 20) and, in the paragraph following the last of Rosaldo's citations, the assertion:

That every Nuer considers himself as good as his neighbour is evident in their every movement. They strut about like lords of the earth, which, indeed they consider themselves to be. (p. 182)

A statement that does nevertheless continue:

There is no master and no servant in their society, but only equals that regard themselves as God's noblest creation. Their respect for one another contrasts with their contempt for all other peoples. (ibid.)

This is juxtaposed, perhaps not without irony, with his representation of colonial society, in particular his relationship with his servant. Furthermore, in the passage omitted from the middle of Rosaldo's second quotation comes this section:

I again emphasize the crudity and discomfort of their lives. All who have lived with Nuer would, I believe, agree that though they are very poor in goods they are very proud in spirit. Schooled in hardship and hunger—for both they express contempt—they accept the direst calamities with resignation and endure them with courage. Content with few goods they despise all that lies outside them; their derisive pride amazes a stranger. (p. 90)

It has been claimed that 'Durkheim has been the medium, so to speak, by which Rousseau has left his mark on modern social science' (Wolin, quoted in Lukes 1973: 3). Nevertheless, the ambivalence of the statements cited above towards 'the pastoral' indicates a direct link with Rousseau and what has become known as his 'noble savage'. Thus, for example, the equality and independence of the Nuer hark back to Rousseau's pre-social man, who loses his equality and independence as society progresses. The pride of the Nuer could be seen as having one of its origins in Rousseau, for whom—in 'The Second Discourse'—man, once he had first gained his 'new intelligence'

would in time become the master of some [animals] and the scourge of others. Thus, the first time he looked into himself, he felt the first emotion of pride; and, at a time when he scarce knew how to distinguish the different orders of beings, by looking upon his species as of the highest order, he prepared the way for assuming pre-eminence as an individual. (Rousseau 1973 [1755]: 77-8)

Rosaldo claims (1986: 95) that 'Evans-Pritchard overextends his assumptions and verbally locates the Nuer in a mythic (past?) age', and cites this statement as an example

Taken with the earlier list of the uses of cattle we can say that the Nuer do not live in an iron age or even in a stone age, but in an age, whatever it may be called, in which plants and beasts furnish technological necessities. (p. 87)

Both this and the statement quoted previously contrasting the qualities of the Nuer with those of peasants can be seen to have their, perhaps only primary, origins in Rousseau's statements (1973: 83) concerning the origins of inequality in societies founded on iron and corn:

From the moment that one man began to stand in need of the help of another, from the moment it appeared advantageous to any one man to have enough provisions for two, equality disappeared, property was introduced, work became indispensable, and vast forests became smiling fields, which man had to water with the sweat of his brow, and where slavery and misery were soon seen to germinate and grow up with the crops.

Metallurgy and agriculture were the two arts which produced this great revolution. The poets tell us it was gold and silver, but, for the philosophers, it was iron and corn, which first civilised men, and ruined humanity.

One might note here Rousseau's ironic allusions to 'the pastoral'. Nevertheless, Evans-Pritchard's *The Nuer* is not the wholesale application of the ideas of Rousseau to a Nilotic people. For Evans-Pritchard, society does not necessarily lead to inequality, rather the Nuer are without great inequalities in cattle. Similarly, much of *The Nuer* can be seen as written with reference to the following passage from Rousseau (1973: 81-2). Once man began to live in a state of society, 'a value came to be attached to public esteem', and,

As soon as men began to value one another, and the idea of consideration had got a footing in the mind, every one put in his claim to it, and it became impossible to refuse it to any with impunity. Hence arose the first obligations of civility even among savages; and every intended injury became an affront; because, besides the hurt which might result from it, the party injured was certain to find in it a contempt for his person, which was often more insupportable than the hurt itself.

Thus, as every man punished the contempt shown in him by others, in proportion to his opinion of himself, revenge became terrible, and men bloody and cruel. This is precisely the state reached by most of the savage nations known to us: and it is for want of having made a proper distinction in our ideas, and seen how very far they already are from the state of nature, that so many writers have hastily concluded that man is cruel, and requires civil institutions to make him more mild....

The final reference in this passage is to Hobbes, and the passage concerns one of the problems addressed by *The Nuer*, that of political order. However, Evans-Pritchard does not respond to it in Hobbesian terms, Rousseauist terms, or even Durkheimian terms of 'restitutive law', rather he sees 'the principle of contradiction' and the values of kinship, ultimately the segmentary lineage system, as

providing the principles of 'ordered anarchy'. His response is even less Hobbesian than Rousseau's, or Durkheim's.

### 3. *The Philosophical Genealogy of the Early Chapters of The Nuer*

Before we deal more fully with the political and 'allegorical' aspects of *The Nuer*, let us first look at it chapter by chapter to see precisely what its philosophical and anthropological background and references are. The genealogy of the segmentary lineage system has been well covered by Kuper (1982), so I will ignore those later chapters with which the book as a whole so often seems to be equated.

#### 3.1 The genealogy of space and time

Evans-Pritchard describes the third chapter of *The Nuer*, concerning time and space, as a bridge between the two parts of the book—the first two chapters concerning cattle and ecological relations and the last three concerning social structure or social systems. One of the immediate ancestors of this piece of writing is mentioned almost explicitly in the text, when Evans-Pritchard states that he is not mainly interested in the 'influence of social structure on the conceptualization of the oecological relations. Thus, to give one example, we do not describe how Nuer classify birds into various lineages on the pattern of their lineage structure' (p. 94). The immediate ancestry of this is Durkheim and Mauss's *Primitive Classification* (1963 [1903]). However, to devote a whole chapter to 'Time and Space' alone, whilst ignoring classification and other categories of thought points to a stress on time and space not present in *Primitive Classification*. In *The Nuer*, time and space are at the origin of the discussion of values, conceptualization and social structure, which are treated in terms of them. The stress on time and space thus speaks more directly of Kant than of Durkheim and Mauss. It is perhaps noteworthy that in his *Emile Durkheim* (1973)—a book that was originally a thesis supervised by Evans-Pritchard—Steven Lukes links *Primitive Classification* to Kant and more directly to the neo-Kantian philosophy of Renouvier and Hamelin (ibid.: 435). It is Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1929 [1781,1787]), and not Durkheim and Mauss's *Primitive Classification*, that begins its discussion of human consciousness and epistemology in the 'transcendental aesthetic' with a discussion of space and time. For Kant, time and space are not only prior to his categories of thought in textual terms, but also together are 'the pure forms of all sensible intuition, and so are what make a priori synthetic propositions possible' (1929: 80). Behind Kant, as Lukes (1973: 435) among others notes, lies David Hume. This is particularly true of the concepts of space and time. For Hume, space and time are, together, one of the 'seven general heads which may be considered as the sources of all philosophical relation' and are 'after

identity the most universal and comprehensive relations' (Hume 1978 [1739-40]: 14); and contiguity in time and place is one of the bases of Hume's discussion of causality. Thus space and time stand at the base of Hume's 'science of Man' upon which 'even Mathematics, Natural Philosophy and Natural Religion, are in some measure dependent' (ibid.: xv).

Evans-Pritchard's discussion of time and space, following Durkheim's, is thus formed in relation to the philosophical positions of Kant and Hume on these matters. For Hume, the ideas of time and space derive, via impressions, from experience. For Kant, time and space are a priori 'representations' which 'underlie all outer intuitions' (Kant 1929: 68).

Durkheim, and Durkheim and Mauss, deal with time and space in the introduction to *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (Durkheim 1976 [1915, 1912]) and *Primitive Classification*. Although in the latter they do not give the same priority to time and space as Kant, in both they outline a position which they see as different to these two earlier philosophical positions. They contradict the 'logicians', who 'consider the hierarchy of concepts as given in things' (Durkheim and Mauss 1963: 4) and 'psychologists', who 'think that the simple play of the association of ideas, and of the laws of contiguity and similarity between mental states, suffice to explain the binding together of images, their organization into concepts classed in relation to each other' (ibid.). In their discussions of Zuffi and Sioux space and time they claim that 'not only do the division of things by regions and the division of society by clan correspond, but they are inextricably interwoven and merged' (ibid.: 47). This can be compared to Durkheim's statement that 'the social organisation has been the model for the spatial organisation and a reproduction of it' (Durkheim 1976: 12). After attempting to show that the classification of things by spatial regions developed out of the classification of things according to clans, Durkheim and Mauss (1963: 66) state that 'when it was a matter of establishing relations between spatial regions, it was the spatial relations which people maintained within their society that served as a starting point'. Thus, they claim some sort of causal priority of social organization in the conceptual organization of space. Evans-Pritchard takes up the priority given to time and space by Kant. Much of his discussion is derived from Durkheim and Mauss's discussion of categories as corresponding to social structure. Thus, central to his discussion of socio-spatial and socio-temporal categories is the concept of structural distance: 'the distance between groups of persons in the social system, expressed in terms of values' (p. 110). This concept is not so much determined by the age-set, lineage and political systems as at the centre of them, giving rise to the numerous spatial representations and the correspondence between the political and lineage systems: 'structural distance in the lineage system of the dominant clans is a function of structural distance in the tribal systems' (pp. 261-2). However, what he adds to the legacy of Durkheim and Mauss are conceptions of ecological distance and time. These are not inherent in the ecology itself, nor in material space, nor are they flat or rationalistic: they are empirical, deriving from relations to 'the world'. Thus, although 'oecological

time-reckoning is ultimately, of course, entirely determined by the movement of the heavenly bodies' (p. 102), rather than being the ideal time of Kant, Evans-Pritchard states that it is 'a series of conceptualizations of natural changes and...the selection of these points of reference is determined by the significance which these natural changes have for human activities' (p. 104) and 'is a conceptualization of collateral, co-ordinated, or co-operative activities' (ibid.).<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, he states: 'though I have spoken of time and units of time the Nuer have no expression equivalent to "time" in our language, and they cannot therefore, as we can, speak of time as though it were something actual' (p. 103). Therefore, our ideality of time in the abstract does not seem transcendent and is not an empirical reality for the Nuer. Similarly: 'oecological distance, in this sense, is a relation between communities, defined in terms of density and distribution, with reference to water, vegetation, animal and insect life, and so on' (p. 109). Once again, space is not a material nor an ideal, nor for that matter sociological, a priori, but rather relative and empirical, founded in collective experience.

### 3.2 Marx and *The Nuer*

Let us turn, now, to the first two chapters of *The Nuer*, concerning 'Interest in Cattle' and 'Oecology', i.e. Nuer 'Modes of Livelihood' rather than their 'Political Institutions' as the book's subtitle terms them. I have already noted how statements in *The Nuer* concerning Nuer character may be traced to Rousseau's 'Second Discourse', which concerns what has become known as the noble savage. One of the central themes of this is the relation between government and inequality. Thus, Rousseau (1963: 97) states: 'The differing forms of government owe their origin to the differing degrees of inequality which existed between individuals at the time of their institution.' Marx later returned to this theme, perhaps the best-known statement of which in Marx's work occurs in his 'Preface' to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1976b: 3): 'The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real basis, on which rises a legal and political superstructure, and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness.' It is also one of the central themes of *The Nuer*. Evans-Pritchard puts what corresponds to the relation between base and superstructure at the centre of *The Nuer* when he states, for example, that Nuer values 'can be shown to be very appropriate to their simple mode of life and the simple set of social relations it engenders' (p. 90). Could one

2. The stress on 'activity' in Evans-Pritchard's account of time is reminiscent of Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach* (Marx and Engels 1970: 121-3), rather than Durkheim and Mauss's (1963) version of Kantian ideal time and space, although it could also derive from Durkheim (1976: 10-11) where he claims that 'a calendar expresses the rhythm of collective activities'.

not see this as a restatement in the case of the Nuer of Marx's statement of the relation between base, superstructure and consciousness?

So let us now look for other similarities between Marx's work and *The Nuer*. Evans-Pritchard deals with 'Modes of Livelihood', Marx with 'Modes of Production'. The first chapter of *Capital* concerns 'The Commodity', the first chapter of *The Nuer* concerns cattle, which could perhaps be seen as the central commodity of Nuer society. Marx begins his analysis of the commodity with the distinction between use and exchange value; by the third page of the first chapter of *The Nuer*, cattle are 'an essential food-supply and the most important social asset' (p. 18) and later are said to have 'great economic utility and social value' (p. 40). Marx claims that 'a use-value, or useful article, has value only because abstract human labour is objectified or materialised in it' (Marx 1976a: 129); following a section concerning the distribution of cattle, Evans-Pritchard devotes the following three sections to their use, stating that 'Nuer value their cows according to the amount of milk they give' (p. 21). In the following two sections Evans-Pritchard deals with labour and refers us forward to the second half (sections 5-10) of the second chapter, in which labour is dealt with in terms of the relation of food-supply to the environment, or of the relation of use-value to nature in Marxist terms. Marx ends his chapter on the commodity by describing 'commodity fetishism'—by which 'nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves...assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things' (Marx 1976a: 165) and in which value 'transforms every product of labour into a social hieroglyphic' (ibid.: 167). For Evans-Pritchard, 'Nuer tend to define all social processes and relationships in terms of cattle. Their social idiom is a bovine idiom' (p. 19). The penultimate section of this first chapter concerns Nuer cattle vocabulary, which shows cattle as 'the superlative value of Nuer life' (p. 48). The final section of the first chapter deals with the importance of cows in the political structure.

However, Evans-Pritchard does not apply the ideas of Marx wholesale to the Nuer. He can be seen as providing a critique of them. Thus: 'I may sum up by repeating that economic relations amongst the Nuer are part of general social relationships and that these relationships [are]...mainly of a domestic and kinship order' (p. 92). He seems to be stating, to put it in Marxist terms, that amongst the Nuer relations of production are part of, not divisible from, other social relations. Indeed, such a statement could be traced back to a critique of the applicability of the concept of exchange value and its replacement by that of social value or social uses in the first chapter of *The Nuer*. The concept of social value, then, lies at the centre of the later chapters on the political and kinship systems. It is this concept that then permits Evans-Pritchard to understate, in the later chapters, the importance of cows in the political system.

Nevertheless, one might be tempted to say that it was the distinction between base and superstructure that led Evans-Pritchard from statements such as 'kinship is customarily defined by reference to these [cattle] payments' (p. 17), to a lineage system devoid of cattle and a political system where cows take a secondary place

to homicide, being mentioned in four pages of parenthetical small type (pp. 165-8) in which cows are seen as a cause of homicide. However, the movement between base and superstructure, from 'Interest in Cattle' to 'The Lineage System', is also a movement from a materialism to an idealism of the forms of value in which 'it does not follow that behaviour always accords with values and it may often be found to be in conflict with them, but it always tends to conform to them' (pp. 263-4). This movement is replicated in each of the first three chapters: from cattle and their uses to their social value; from ecology to social relations; and from ecological time and distance to structural distance.

Let us here briefly mention one final possible reference back, namely to anarchist ideas. *The Nuer* concerns a stateless society and in it traces of William Godwin's anarchism can perhaps be found. In particular, those references to a simple political society could perhaps have their origins in Godwin's description of simplicity as a feature of his proposed anarchist society (1976 [1793]: 553), rather than testifying to the backwardness of the Nuer.

#### 4. *The Nuer as Political Allegory*

Let us now look at the possible allegorical aspects of *The Nuer*. It is perhaps easy to read Rousseau's Second Discourse, on the origins of inequality, as a portrayal of 'a state of nature' of 'the noble savage' and his rise to 'civilization'. However, Rousseau begins it (1973: 45) by stating:

The philosophers, who have inquired into the foundations of society, have all felt the necessity of going back to a state of nature; but not one of them has got there.... Every one of them, in short, constantly dwelling on wants, avidity, oppression, desires, and pride, has transferred onto the state of nature ideas that were acquired in society; so that, in speaking of the savage, they described the social man. It has not even entered into the heads of most of our writers to doubt whether the state of nature ever existed...we must deny that, even before the deluge, men were ever in the pure state of nature; unless, indeed, they fell back into it from some very extraordinary circumstance; a paradox which it would be very embarrassing to defend, and quite impossible to prove.

Let us begin then by laying all facts aside, as they do not affect the question. The investigations we may enter into, in treating this subject, must not be considered as historical truths, but only as mere conditional and hypothetical reasonings, rather calculated to explain the nature of things, than to ascertain their actual origin....

This suggests to me that 'the noble savage' can be best read as a statement that neither language, inequality, violence nor evil is natural or innate; as a statement about the possible forms of society and the causes of inequality and government;

as a conscious myth or allegory rather than just an 'origin myth'. Rousseau's Second Discourse is directed against what he sees as Hobbes's arguments for absolutism, namely that in 'the state of nature' man is in a state of anarchic violent barbarism and therefore needs an absolutist state to protect himself against it, and that an absolutist state is to be accepted like the authority of a parent. Assuming that each generation calls on the ghosts of the past for their own purposes, let us look now at what possible allegorical purposes Evans-Pritchard could have had in conjuring up the ghost of Rousseau.

*The Nuer* was published in 1940, and was presumably written between 1937 and 1940. Britain went to war with Germany in 1939, and *The Nuer* may have been written either before the outbreak of war or just after it. As an empirical restatement of Rousseau's arguments against absolutism, it may be seen as an ideological attack on Fascism and the absolutist state. Parts of it are a clear, if allegorical, statement against Fascism in, or at the end of, a time in which such well-known names as Paul de Mann, Celine, Heidegger, Pound, Eliot and D. H. Lawrence were at least ambivalent towards it, and at the end of a period in British political history that involved such 'characters' as the British Union of Fascists, Oswald Mosley, Lord Rothermere and the *Daily Mail* with its 1934 headline 'Hurrah for the Blackshirts'. I mention these just to point out that the attitudes of many European intellectuals, and also some of those in positions of power, were somewhat ambiguous towards Fascism, and that support for it extended into British intellectual and political life, although by the time of the publication of *The Nuer* after the outbreak of war, attitudes may well have changed.

Let us now turn towards the question of colonialism. A perhaps crude rendering of Hobbes's philosophy is uniquely suited to providing a colonial ideology or justification for colonialism, a view we can indeed find in statements of British colonialists. Take, for example, a statement by Cecil Rhodes to the South African Parliament:

I will lay down my own policy on this Native question. Either you have to receive them on an equal footing as citizens, or to call them a subject race. Well, I have made up my mind that there must be class legislation, that there must be Pass Laws, and Peace Preservation Acts, and that we have got to treat natives, where they are in a state of barbarism, in a different way to ourselves. We are to be lords over them. These are my politics on native affairs, and these are the politics of South Africa. Treat the natives as a subject people, as long as they continue in a state of barbarism and communal tenure; be lords over them, and let them be a subject race.... The native is to be treated as a child and denied the franchise; he is to be denied liquor also; and upon the principles of the honourable member of Stellenbosch himself, I call on him to go with me on this. (Quoted in Alvai and Shanin 1982: 72-3)

Given some recent statements on Evans-Pritchard's relation to colonialism, one might be surprised to find that he does not expound such a neo-Hobbesian view; indeed he expresses an anti-Hobbesian view. Just as Rousseau's argument against

Hobbes can be seen as an ideological resistance to absolutism, Evans-Pritchard's implicit references to Rousseau can also be seen as an ideological resistance to the colonial utilization of Hobbes. *The Nuer* is, in that respect, anti-colonialist and in the line of Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid* (1987 [1902]), which was an explicit attack on the Hobbesian version of Darwinianism to be found in Spencer's evolutionary sociology and Thomas Henry Huxley's 'very incorrect representation of the facts of Nature' (Kropotkin 1987: 17).<sup>3</sup>

There are other statements in *The Nuer* that could also be read as implicitly anti-colonialist. For example,

...it is impossible to live among Nuer and conceive of rulers ruling over them.

The Nuer is a product of hard and egalitarian upbringing, is deeply democratic, and easily roused to violence. His turbulent spirit finds any restraint irksome and no man recognises a superior. (p. 181)

Such a statement suggests to me a wish that the Nuer should be left to their independence rather than a desire for their colonial exploitation. Similarly, the situation about which the Byronic 'Operations on the Akobo' (1973) was written, and which Geertz totally ignores (Free 1990), also perhaps points to Evans-Pritchard's opposition to Fascism. Prior to the Second World War, and Evans-Pritchard's operations, Abyssinia had been invaded by Mussolini in a war of self-aggrandizement that was termed by the British left, amongst others, as an act of Fascist aggression. It was also one of the last acts of European colonialism in which a previously independent African state was annexed. Here the interests of British colonialism were not only anti-Fascist, but also anti-imperialist.

## 5. The Nuer *and Colonial Domination*

Let us now look at other links between *The Nuer* and colonialism. Rosaldo states (1986: 96) that 'it seems fitting that a discourse that denies the domination that makes its knowledge possible idealizes, as alter egos, shepherds rather than peasants'. There seem to be a few fairly common interrelated ideas concerning the relation of anthropology to colonialism underlying this statement.

The first claim is that it idealizes, or idealized, 'the natives'. We have already seen that Evans-Pritchard's presentation could not be seen as a simple 'pastoral'. But there is a logical flaw in this aspect of the statement anyway, namely, that if

3. Thomas Huxley's view was promoted in the manifesto *Struggle for Existence and its Bearing on Man*, issued in 1888 at the zenith of colonialism, in the same period as Rhodes' speech (Hewetson 1987; Kropotkin 1987: 12-20). Kropotkin's influence may have reached Evans-Pritchard via Radcliffe-Brown (Kuper 1983 [1973]: 34).

you are going to say that *The Nuer* is an idealization of the Nuer, you would have to say that you have some access to the reality of the Nuer. The only other available access to the realities of Nuer life in the 1930s is, as far as I am aware, the statements of colonial officers. These would be equally conditioned by their, at least slightly different, existential interests possibly to produce a neo-Hobbesian view of the Nuer. Without any access to the realities of Nuer life, you could only be reiterating prejudices, that are perhaps 'neo-Hobbesian', without any impressions of the Nuer at all. Any such statements must be pure rhetoric and moreover could be seen to support the political position of Cecil Rhodes and any of his political successors.

A second aspect of Rosaldo's statement is the claim that *The Nuer* denies colonial domination, and that perhaps—Rosaldo does not seem to state this, but it could be an argument levelled against anthropology—it thus idealizes the Nuer's relations to the colonial power. However, Rosaldo himself points to the numerous statements in the introduction to *The Nuer* concerning colonial domination, and furthermore Evans-Pritchard links centrally the prophets to the 'new conditions of Arab-European intrusion' (p. 191). He also explicitly relates how 'a Government force surrounded our camp one morning at sunrise, searched for two prophets who had been leaders in a recent revolt, took hostages, and threatened to take many more if the prophets were not handed over' (p. 11). This could be an understatement, but it is not a denial—perhaps such a distinction is 'very British'. Thus, Evans-Pritchard could possibly be said to play down the importance of colonial domination for the Nuer, or its violence. Here again, if you are going to assert without reference to any other account of the Nuer at that time, that colonial domination was of more importance for the Nuer than Evans-Pritchard states from his impressions, do you not risk claiming purely rhetorically that colonialism was an irresistible monolith? Rosaldo's statement (1986: 97) that 'the pastoral mode becomes self-serving because the shepherd symbolizes that point beyond domination where neutral ethnographic truth can collect itself' comes dangerously close to such a moral, political and purely rhetorical position. On the other hand, if you are going to state that Evans-Pritchard should have dealt more fully in *The Nuer* with colonial resistance, you are suggesting he should have been more of a spy. If you suggest that he could have dealt more fully with colonial resistance, you are denying the conditions of knowledge or are just being patronizing about the Nuer—suggesting, more or less, that they were politically stupid.

This discussion thus brings us towards an affirmation of a third aspect of Rosaldo's statement, its concern with the importance of the existential conditions of knowledge: that colonial domination did more than just make the anthropology of that period possible—in some sense of the word, it conditioned it or was an integral aspect of it. Let us deal with two connections between anthropological fieldwork and power that are in no way necessary or even constant.

First, that of seeing or looking, in anthropology and power. Evans-Pritchard states that

As I could not use the easier and shorter method of working through regular informants I had to fall back on direct observation of, and participation in, the everyday life of the people. From the door of my tent I could see what was happening in camp or village and every moment was spent in Nuer company. (p. 15)

Renato Rosaldo (1986: 92) remarks of this that 'in retrospect, the fieldworker's mode of surveillance uncomfortably resembles Michel Foucault's Panopticon, the site from which the (disciplining) disciplines enjoy gazing upon (and subjecting) their subjects'. For Foucault (1977: 195-228), the Panopticon is an image of power, or discipline, for the twentieth century. Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon was a prison consisting of a central tower from which a ring of outer individual cells are permanently visible, while the observer in the central tower cannot be seen from the cells. It abolishes the crowd—Goya's howling masses—and replaces it with a multiplicity of numerable, supervisable individuals who are no longer communicating people but merely objects of information, with no horizontal links through the walls of the Panopticon. Through it power functions independently of any one person exercising it; it renders the actual exercise of power unnecessary as the prisoners themselves bear it. It is 'a machine for dissociating the see/being-seen dyad' (ibid.: 201-202). It is here that, for Foucault, the sciences of man—he mentions 'psychology, psychiatry, criminology, and so many other strange sciences' (ibid.: 226)—have their origin.

However, in itself, Evans-Pritchard's fieldwork was not panoptic. Indeed, even before the end of the 'door-of-my-tent' sentence he is writing that 'every moment was spent in Nuer company', and earlier he states:

As I became more friendly with the Nuer and more at home in their language they visited me from early morning till late at night, and hardly a moment of the day passed without men, women or boys in my tent... These endless visits entailed constant badinage and interruption and, although they offered opportunity for improving my knowledge of the Nuer language, imposed a severe strain. Nevertheless, if one chooses to reside in a Nuer camp one must submit to Nuer custom, and they are persistent and tireless visitors. The chief privation was the publicity to which all my actions were exposed, and it was not long before I became hardened, though never entirely insensitive, to performing the most intimate operations before an audience or in full view of the camp. (pp. 14-15)

This does not point to any dissociation of the seeing/being-seen dyad, nor to the Nuer becoming individualized objects of information rather than communicating people. Indeed, Evans-Pritchard states that 'as soon as I started to discuss a custom with one man another would interrupt the conversation in pursuance of an affair of his own or by an exchange of pleasantries or jokes' (p. 14). At worst, the Nuer become 'sources of information' and are represented as 'the Nuer' or in terms of the social values of their system, rather than as individuated objects. The application of the image of the Panopticon to *The Nuer* ignores the invisibility to

Evans-Pritchard of certain aspects of Nuer life; it writes the Nuer out of *The Nuer*, replacing them with prisoners; and it ignores their resistance and the role they played in the construction of *The Nuer*. It is as if anthropology did at some stage possess a key of pure seeing that rendered social life visible. This brings us again to 'the conditions of knowledge'.

Let us dissociate seeing from a necessary connection to power. Foucault (1973) points to 'the gaze', and in 'surveillance' (*surveiller*) (1977) explicitly links seeing to power.<sup>4</sup> However, seeing is not inextricably, necessarily or even constantly linked to power. There are different ways of seeing than 'the gaze' or *surveiller*, than looking over, inspecting or supervising. The importance of seeing or looking as the origin of resistance, rather than power or domination, surveillance or discipline, is suggested by the poetry of Blake and Shelley, for example, even if this poetry is pre-Panoptic or perhaps on the cusp of Panopticism. In Blake's 'The Garden of Love', seeing is a resistance to the power of the organized religion of the time, while in Shelley's 'The Masque of Anarchy', seeing is part of the rhetorical resistance to 'God, and King, and Law'. Both poems show that seeing need not always be 'surveillance', need not necessarily be simply a function of power, but that it can be an aspect of the resistance to power. Foucault himself, in his essay 'The Eye of Power', in *Power/Knowledge*, talks of 'the Rousseauist dream' of a 'transparent society that opposed the darkneses of royal power in the eighteenth century (1980: 152). In his conclusion to the essay 'Truth and Power' in the same volume he is ambivalent about any necessary relationship between power and truth. He writes, 'it's not a matter of emancipating truth from every system of power (which would be a chimera, for truth is already power) but of detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic and cultural, within which it operates at the present time (ibid.) .

## 6. *The Existential Conditions of The Nuer*

Let us now turn to the more concrete existential conditions of *The Nuer*. There are first the material and political conditions that made it possible. Evans-Pritchard points to these, rather than away from them. He states in the first sentence of the Preface: 'my study of the Nuer was undertaken at the request of, and was mainly financed by, the Government of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, which also contributed generously towards the publication of its results' (p. vii); and he later states in his Introductory: 'when the Government of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan asked me to

4. *Surveiller et Punir* is the title of the original French (1975) edition of *Discipline and Punish* (1977). However, according to the translator's note, 'the verb *surveiller* has no adequate English equivalent'. For a discussion of the translation, see that note.

make a study of the Nuer I accepted after hesitation and with misgivings' (p. 7). He has already, on the first page of the introductory to *The Nuer*, stated:

A later source of information about the Nuer are the *Sudan Intelligence Reports* which run from the reconquest of the Sudan in 1899 to the present day, their ethnological value decreasing in recent years. In the first two decades after the reconquest there are a few reports by military officers...several political officers contributed papers on the Nuer. Two of these officers were killed in the performance of their duty.... (p. 1)

These comments may be disarming, but for me when I first read the book they raised the question of exactly what his relationship to the colonial powers was, rather than offset them, as Rosaldo claims they do.

Similarly, Evans-Pritchard points towards the conditions of knowledge in the political situation of his fieldwork, rather than obscuring them:

It would at any time have been difficult to do research among the Nuer, and at the period of my visit they were unusually hostile, for their recent defeat by Government forces and the measures taken to ensure their final submission had occasioned deep resentment. Nuer have often remarked to me, 'You raid us, yet you say we cannot raid the Dinka'; 'You overcame us with firearms and we had only spears. If we had had firearms we would have routed you'; and so forth. When I entered a cattle camp it was not only as a stranger but as an enemy, and they seldom tried to conceal their disgust at my presence, refusing to answer my greetings, and even turning away when I addressed them. (p. 11)

And in the paragraph preceding that in which he gives the example of his conversation with Cuol (of which Rosaldo claims Evans-Pritchard finds 'that the fault in this unhappy encounter lies with Nuer character, rather than with historically specified circumstances' (1986: 91)), Evans-Pritchard states that 'the Nuer are expert at sabotaging an inquiry' and that 'questions about customs were blocked by a technique I can commend to natives who are inconvenienced by the curiosity of ethnologists' (p. 12). Above all, what Evans-Pritchard seems to do in the introduction to *The Nuer* is not to dissociate ethnography from the colonial conditions of knowledge in order to convince a reader of its truth, but to attempt to dissociate the aims and values of ethnography from the purposes and values of colonial domination. In this light, objectivity can be viewed as a keystone of a moral and social attitude that distanced anthropology as much from the colonial interests of the society of which it was part as from the colonized societies from which anthropology is always already socially distanced.

The two conditions of *The Nuer* Evans-Pritchard does not explicitly point to are those of colonial society in the Sudan and Egypt and of Oxford of the late 1930s. However, Jaques Maquet, who at least had some empirical impressions of the relationship between anthropology and colonialism, does attempt to grapple with this relationship in his 1964 article 'Objectivity in Anthropology'. For him,

anthropologists were 'scholars whose material and professional interests lay in their home countries but who participated in the privileges of the dominant caste during their stay in Africa' (Maquet 1964: 48). But he also states:

These characteristics of their existential situation were perfectly compatible with holding progressive views.... The anthropologists' existential situation was perfectly compatible with the participant-observer attitude that some of them assumed, not so much for purposes of research but rather out of their deep sympathy for the society they were studying. Moreover, since their activities were marginal relative to those of the production-conscious European caste, who looked upon the anthropologists' work as a romantic waste of money, the anthropologists were orientated toward nonconformist attitudes critical of the colonial order. (Ibid.)

But he also notes that the position of the anthropologist depended on the political stability of the society, which an attitude of 'mild conservatism' would have defended. He sees this as an objective, though not necessarily perceived interest and claims that it was not in fact advocated. He further notes that the valorization of traditional cultures was a socially useful trend for the colonial regimes as they balanced traditional and progressive forces in decolonization.

As to whether the valorization of traditional cultures stemmed from its political uses, or was made possible by them, or whether those political uses of anthropology were merely *ad hoc*, or even whether anthropology in some way revealed this political strategy I can make no comment. Nevertheless, I would suggest that colonialism did condition *The Nuer* in yet another way. In its Hobbesian and racist attitudes, colonialism set the agenda for a concern with the study of the state or politics and even with witchcraft and rationality—and behind that, these themes were set in the Enlightenment. But these colonial attitudes also set the agenda for their empirical falsification, just as the colonial nations set the agenda for national liberation movements.

## 7. Conclusions

I have suggested that recent articles portraying anthropology as writing have ignored the philosophical genealogy of *The Nuer* and thus also the political position of Evans-Pritchard's work. The world in which writing happens is dealt with by both Geertz and Rosaldo as *the world*—a singular unitary world without divisions, least of all political divisions. This type of writing about writing displays a kind of functionalism far beyond Radcliffe-Brown's. It is no longer even a matter of the relation of parts to a whole, but merely the presentation of a whole undivided, with any particular text as an example of it. When this whole world is linked solely to power, and not also to resistance, the illusion of an

indestructible colonial monolith is reborn. Furthermore, in equating Evans-Pritchard with Cecil Rhodes, or in ignoring Cecil Rhodes and Oswald Mosley, the British past is effectively whitewashed beneath the quaint myths of dreaming spires, of 'the folk model of Anglo-Saxon democracy' (Kuklick 1984: 71), and of 'The least He that is in England...has a life to live as the greatest He' (Geertz 1988: 71).

In these literary approaches to anthropology, the stress on a work of anthropology as a literary creation ensures that any consideration of the specific philosophical genealogies of specific works is obscured and that the ancestry of anthropology and the social sciences in moral philosophy is overlooked. Furthermore, the lack of any reference to the worlds in and of which anthropology is written ensures that the complex political background of any text is hidden beneath the concentration on internal relations between texts. The political resistance to both colonialism and Fascism implicit in Evans-Pritchard's work has been consistently overlooked in recent writings about his writings. This may be partially due to stereotypes of Evans-Pritchard, but it is also due to the obliteration of the philosophical roots of anthropology in some recent attempts to deal with it purely as literature.

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## THE FIELDWORK PHOTOGRAPHS OF JENNESS AND MALINOWSKI AND THE BEGINNINGS OF MODERN ANTHROPOLOGY

TERENCE WRIGHT

### 1. *Introduction*

If asked to select a name and date for the founding of modern anthropology, we would probably be expected to settle for Malinowski and 1914, the year in which he began his pioneering fieldwork in the Trobriands. However, we may well be encouraged to widen our enquiry—to shift emphasis from the vision of the individual anthropologist, and direct attention towards the socio-historical determinants of anthropological theory. Set against this background is an aspect of anthropological practice that is often overlooked—fieldwork photography. Here the camera has been used more often as a mute recording device, considered to be a transparent method of visual note-taking. But the last decade has seen renewed interest in photography's contribution to ethnography. No longer serving a simple

Malinowski's photographs appear with the kind permission of his daughter, Mrs H. Wayne. Jenness's photographs appear by courtesy of the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford. All quotations from Jenness's letters are from those in the Marett Papers in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. I should like to thank Elizabeth Edwards for her constructive comments on earlier drafts of this article. An exhibition of Jenness's photographs, *Wamo, d'Entrecasteaux Islands New Guinea, 1911-1912: Photographs by Diamond Jenness*, is to be held at the Pitt Rivers Museum from 1st June 1991 to early 1992.

illustrative function, the photograph can be now regarded as a reflector of the anthropologist's standpoint.

In so far as photographs reflect theoretical outlook, the examples used in this article would appear to refute the notion of a gradual process of circumstantial change. The pre-1914 photographs of Diamond Jenness, dull and uninspired, closely follow the prescribed routines of nineteenth-century ethnography. Yet the photographs of Bronislaw Malinowski himself, taken just two years later, represent the post-1914 era. They display an active gathering of information, through which he evolved his own style and line of enquiry. From this cursory glance at the photographs, we might be forgiven for falling in line with popular opinion—for it would be easy to construe that indeed Malinowski 1914, marked the watershed for anthropology.

While this article looks at the photographs in the light of prevailing anthropological theories, it also considers the images in conjunction with the accounts of the ethnographers themselves. And some details, which initially may appear trivial, become especially relevant in the context of the photographs. At the same time as addressing some general issues pertinent to ethnographic photography, the article suggests the inadequacy of theoretical polarization and simplistic causality.

To obtain a clearer picture, it is necessary to look beyond the photographs to the anthropologists' written accounts: to Jenness's correspondence with R. R. Marett and to Malinowski's diaries. The comparability of sources is questionable, for it may be considered unfair to attempt to equate Malinowski's diaries, renowned for their candid nature, with Jenness's letters to Marett, who was, after all, his supervisor: they could hardly be as revealing. Furthermore, in its unusual form, as textual manifestation of inner speech, the aim of a diary is primarily self-referential, yet at the same time addressed to a nondescript persona. In the case of Malinowski they have reached a readership not of the author's intention. But perhaps we should not be seduced by the intimacy of Malinowski's personal mode of address, and should not feel that it precludes insight into his working methods as an anthropologist.

The photographs of Diamond Jenness, now collected in the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, were taken during a period of fieldwork in the D'Entrecasteaux Archipelago of Papua in 1911-12. Jenness was based on Goodenough, or Nidula, Island. His anthropological work in the area of south-east New Guinea followed his studies for the Oxford Diploma in Anthropology in 1910. The expedition was funded by various Oxford colleges and private individuals, including Henry Balfour, the curator of the Pitt Rivers Museum. It was expected of Jenness that he make a collection of artefacts for the museum. His photographs, 576 in all, cover the period of a year—from 1st December 1911, when he arrived in New Guinea, to December 1912, which marked the conclusion of the expedition.

Only once, in *The Northern D'Entrecasteaux* (Jenness and Ballantyne 1920), the book which resulted from his fieldwork, does Jenness refer to photography: 'Once when we had run out of tobacco we engaged a native to carry the camera

and its outfit two or three miles, promising him a stick of tobacco the following day. We never saw him again for a month' (ibid.: 207). Some may consider that this in itself is telling with regard to his approach to ethnology and equally, perhaps, to photography. That Jenness, in particular, makes few comments about his approach to photography is tantalizing, yet hardly surprising: general commentary about the use of photography in fieldwork has been seriously neglected by anthropologists.

Malinowski, however, is an exception. Working a couple of years after Jenness, and in the same geographical area, Malinowski's photographs form a second anthropological collection that is very different in both the approach taken to the subject of enquiry and the use of the camera. In Kaberry's essay (1957) on Malinowski's contribution to fieldwork methods one might have expected some acknowledgement of the role of photography, but she makes just a single passing reference to it. And Malinowski's own writings provide little critical insight about his use of the medium. Nevertheless, from his collection of photographs in the archives of the London School of Economics, we know he was a prolific photographer and, from his diaries (Malinowski 1967), published ten years after Kaberry's essay, we know that photography was a major preoccupation of his.

By the time either Jenness or Malinowski was working in Melanesia, the use of photography in the service of ethnographic fieldwork was commonplace. Initial attempts to record 'exotic' people and places had given way to more serious attempts to study other cultures. These developments were paralleled by the use of the photography archive for the study of the lives of others. In 1874, The British Association for the Advancement of Science produced, under the direction of Tylor, the first edition of *Notes and Queries on Anthropology, for the Use of Travellers and Residents in Uncivilized Lands* (BAAS 1874). Later a committee was formed for the collection, preservation, and systematic registration of photographic material of anthropological interest, a report of this committee being published in the BAAS Report of 1882. Two years later anthropology was established as an independent section of the association (Stocking 1987: 263).

During the same period the *British Journal of Photography* of 1889 mentions two uses of photographic archives: to provide 'a record as complete as it can be made...of the present state of the world' and to provide 'valuable documents' for the future. In 1892, Im Thurn addressed the Anthropological Institute on the subject of 'Anthropological Uses of the Camera', one of these being 'for the accurate record, not of the mere bodies of primitive folk...but of these folk regarded as living beings' (Im Thurn 1892: 184).

## 2. *Jenness*

To return to Jenness, we find that because he made so few references to his photographs, we have to look more to the context in which he was operating.

While this may involve some conjecture, it is safe to assume that Marett exerted a considerable influence. In 1911, as Reader in Social Anthropology in the University of Oxford, Marett played a significant part in forming Jenness's approach to anthropology. In his role as academic supervisor he communicated by letter with Jenness in the field. We have at least one side of the correspondence—Jenness's replies to Marett's letters are held in the Bodleian Library at Oxford.

Marett's own writings may be used to suggest other formative influences. From his *The Diffusion of Culture* (1927: 4) we get a clear (if perhaps slightly exaggerated) portrayal of how he saw his supervisory role in relation to field-workers such as Jenness. Marett wrote: 'the man in the study busily propounded questions which only the man in the field could answer, and in the light of the answers that poured in from the field the study as busily revised its questions' (*ibid.*). Furthermore, we can presume that Marett's book *Anthropology* (1912) reflects the content of his anthropological seminars during the period from 1908 to 1910 in which Jenness studied for the Diploma in Anthropology. A few key points from this book indicate the sort of anthropology that influenced Jenness: 'anthropology is the child of Darwin, Darwinism makes it possible. Reject the Darwinian point of view, and you must reject anthropology also' (*ibid.*: 8). Elsewhere (*ibid.*: 74), Marett expresses the importance of establishing the cranial index, and later, we find him neither embracing nor completely rejecting Galton's theory of eugenics, popular at this time.<sup>1</sup> Rather, he positions himself at a comfortable distance: 'to improve the race by way of eugenics, though doubtless feasible within limits, remains an unrealised possibility through our want of knowledge' (*ibid.*: 95).

Marett's influence was not limited to academic matters. He was instrumental in helping Jenness fund the expedition. On 1st March 1911, he circulated a letter to the heads of various Oxford colleges requesting financial support, giving a succinct description of the aims of the project:

It has been ascertained that, by using as his base the mission station established in the D'Entrecasteaux Islands, he will have a most favourable opportunity of studying the natives of this almost unknown region.... In return for such pecuniary aid Mr. Jenness promises to make over to the Pitt Rivers Museum whatever specimens he may secure of native handiwork...and present his researches in the form of a Report.

It was considered good fortune that the mission station was run by Jenness's brother-in-law, the Rev. A. Ballantyne, who with Jenness was to become co-author of *The Northern D'Entrecasteaux* (1920).

1. Galton (1890) had evolved a technique which he called 'analytical photography', the 'objectivity' of the camera being used to establish racial types through the superimposition of photographic images.

On 27th May 1911, in a note to Marett, Jenness outlined his programme:

- 2 months general examination of D'Entrecasteaux
- 8 months specific study of Goodenough Island
- 2 months study of trade relations with neighbouring islands—e.g. Trobriand Islands

Much of their correspondence at this time concerned the acquisition of a phonograph, and a 'tintometer' or pigmentation meter. Although it seems that Jenness was placing much of his faith in the available anthropological technology, there is little evidence of concern over his photographic preparations, except that in the event of his death the camera, along with other equipment, should be left to the Oxford Committee for Anthropology.

Before embarking on the expedition Jenness spent a short while at his home in New Zealand, there practising his photography. In a letter to Marett of 7th November 1911 he wrote: 'I have taken some photos of some of our curios, & shall take prints of them with me'. On his way to Goodenough Island, he stopped off at Samarai and wrote another letter to Marett (dated 16 Dec. 1911), mentioning: 'I have some notebooks & my anatomical instruments, as well as a camera & 2 or 3 dozen plates'. While waiting here for his voyage to Goodenough Island he practised his anthropological techniques on the Samarai natives. Marett included Jenness's 'findings' in his preface to *The Northern D'Entrecasteaux*:

While waiting...for the pearl-trader's cutter that was to take him on to Goodenough, he gets to work with his anthropological instruments on the native patients in the hospital, and is put out a little on finding that a shock of frizzly hair makes it hard to get one's head-measurements right to the last millimetre. (Marett 1920)

However, in the letter from Samarai, Jenness mentions other things on his mind that created difficulties in obtaining measurements: 'full measurements would have been rather difficult—in some cases impossible, owing to the different maladies.'

His work at the hospital also presented him with the opportunity to cut his photographic teeth. The patients were photographed full-face and profile (Figs. 1 and 2). He fulfilled the requirements of his 'scientific' approach either by putting the distant field of vision out of focus or by setting the subject against a minimal background, a favourite location being in front of a light galvanized shed presumably situated in the hospital grounds: 'I photographed several & the plates have turned out fairly well on the whole' (16 Dec. 1911).

As far as can be told from his letters to Marett, this appears to be his sole evaluation of his photographic method. From the institutionalized subject, Jenness would have found little resistance to photography. Along with his concern to measure the patients, his photographic treatment of the subject was intended to obtain 'scientifically valid' information. This is also evident in the Samarai Hospital photographs in which the subjects appear to have been 'pre-numbered' (Fig. 3). When he first arrived at the Bwaidoga Mission Station on Goodenough he employed his practised technique. The resulting images were later to be included

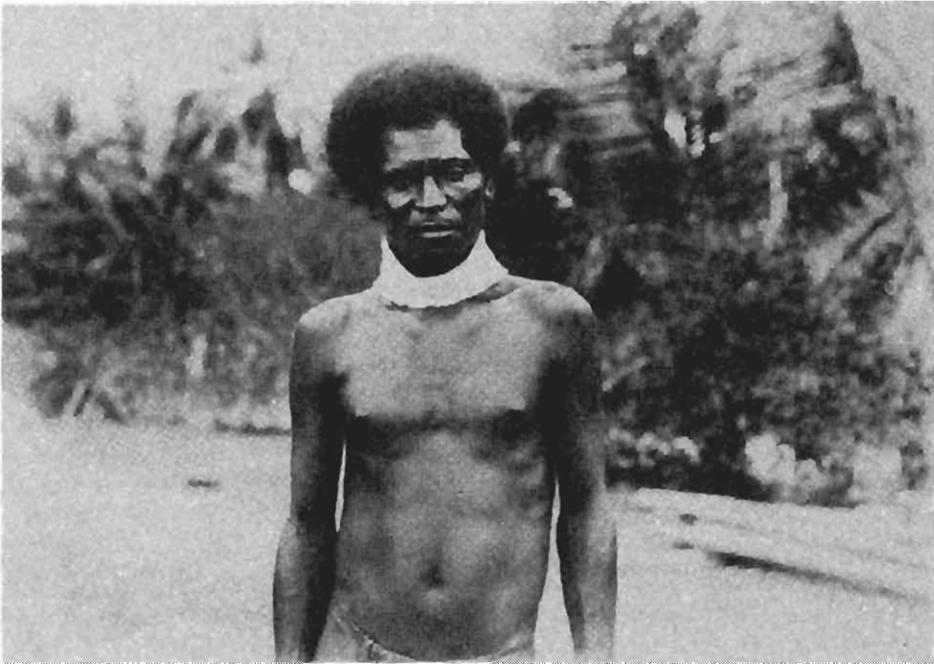


FIG. 1. Diamond Jenness, *Patient at Samarai Hospital: Full Face*

in the *The Northern D'Entrecasteaux* under 'The Natives—Their Physical and Mental Characteristics'. His association with the Goodenough Mission certainly established him in a position of authority as a photographer, giving him the opportunity to recruit subjects. Besides a dozen such anthropometric photographs, Jenness obtained the head indices and heights of 60 people and full measurements of six or seven.

As well as identifying with the 'spiritual authorities', in the form of the Mission, Jenness allied himself to civil authority by becoming friends with the policeman from Wagifa, a small island off the south-east coast of Goodenough. He went for trips in his boat, a photograph of which appears in *The Northern D'Entrecasteaux* (facing p. 18). It was part of police duties to report on cannibalism, a practice which was met with harsh penalties. During the period on Goodenough, Jenness and Ballantyne took it upon themselves to check out reports of cannibalism. It may seem surprising that despite his close associations with the authorities of church and government he should feel that: 'the natives have confidence in me & regard me more as one of themselves' (letter to Marett, 26 July 1912).

While Marett's influence was sustained by correspondence throughout the duration of the expedition, Jenness also received in May 1912, from the publishers, a copy of Marett's *Anthropology* published that year. Almost a year later, in a



FIG. 2. Diamond Jenness, *Patient at Samarai Hospital: Profile*

letter of March 1913, he wrote: 'I enjoyed your "Anthropology" immensely and have been recommending it to everyone, so that they can judge for themselves whether I am biased.' While this comment could have been a form of appeasement—in the same letter he announces that his report would not be ready: he is off to the Arctic—the overall form of *The Northern D'Entrecasteaux* was foreshadowed by Marett's *Anthropology*. With minor modifications, most of the chapter headings were those used by Marett and are in a similar sequential order.

At this early stage of his anthropological career, it may well be that Jenness's amateurish approach to fieldwork in general did not enable him to make the most of the photographic possibilities. Not all the disasters that affected his work were of his own making, though his reliance upon available technology—of which the camera was a part—and perhaps the influence of Ballantyne, his brother-in-law, made him less able to cope in times of adversity. Ballantyne comes across as a rather domineering, clumsy individual, and much of Jenness's experience of Goodenough seems to have been coloured by Ballantyne's impressions. The letters to Marett mention Ballantyne's aid with translation and regret that he did not live to see the publication of *The Northern D'Entrecasteaux*: 'so great, indeed, was the assistance he rendered me that we agreed to collaborate. I am therefore responsible for the form of this report, but any merit that may be found in it is due almost entirely to Ballantyne' (Jenness and Ballantyne 1920: 12-13). While some allowance



FIG. 3. Diamond Jenness, *Patient at Samarai Hospital: Profile*

must be made for modesty on Jenness's part, the strains of duty were apparently felt by many, and *The Northern D'Entrecasteaux* was something of a family effort: 'owing to my absence in the Arctic, much of the labour that preceded the final drafting of the report fell upon my two sisters, Miss G. and Miss A. Jenness' (ibid.).

While the expedition was largely unsuccessful, Jenness should not be held entirely to blame. There were problems with the phonograph. In May it was producing 'poor results', by July—'the phonograph has had its day'—it had run out of cylinders. Enough material, however, remained in one form or another for Jenness to bring out a second publication on the songs of Bwaidoga (Jenness and Ballantyne 1928). Neither the results nor the fate of the 'tintometer' are recorded. Furthermore a drought—'the most disastrous known for many years'—hit the island. This resulted in a three-month famine from May to July 1912. And finally a large number of specimens, on their way to the Pitt Rivers Museum, were destroyed by a fire on board the *SS Turkina* just off Rio de Janeiro.

One does not need to read too much between the lines to detect a sense of despondency and an accompanying loss of interest. Duty-bound to produce the report and final publication, there follows a list of excuses to Marett, though it is fair to say that many were justifiable. And, despite the interruptions of the Arctic expedition and the 1914-18 War, whenever possible his correspondence with

Marett continued: 'I am looking forward each day for the letter that will put me into a uniform. There is only one thing I am afraid of, I may be too late to see active service' (March 1917). And in a letter from Germany (18 Dec. 1918): 'with regard to the photos—a complete catalogue of my photos is nearly completed'.

The impression of Goodenough in *The Northern D'Entrecasteaux* is of an island where the traditional pattern of life has broken down. The islanders no longer respect the totemic laws of marriage, nor observe tribal taboos, and chiefs are unable to maintain their authority over a people who have relinquished their faith in indigenous religion. In part, this loss of 'traditional' lifestyle appears to contrast with the much later work of Young (1983: 11) who finds an 'ever-renewed and inexhaustible corpus of Kalauna oral literature...greatly enriched since European contact by the addition of Bible stories', while in the area influenced by the 'Bwaidoka' (*sic*) Methodist Mission it was no longer regarded important to keep the myths secret (*ibid.*: 264-5).

When the book by Jenness and Ballantyne was finally published in 1920 a favourable, though not outstanding, review was published in *Man* (Barton 1921: 111). Nowhere did the photographs receive special mention.

Earlier, Jenness had mentioned his debt to Haddon for 'much counsel and assistance'. In October 1932, in return, Haddon requested a number of Jenness's plates featuring canoes. They provided reference material for a drawing of a canoe: 'Jenness has kindly lent me a large number of photographs, and it is from these sources that the following account has been compiled' (Haddon 1937: 272). So Jenness's expedition photographs were not necessarily without purpose, but their primary function of transparent note-taking is reinforced by this use of his images.

### 3. Malinowski

The work of Jenness on Goodenough pre-dated Malinowski's time in the same geographical area by almost three years. Malinowski also took photographs as part of his fieldwork. Yet with Malinowski's photographs one is immediately impressed by their degree of accomplishment. Not only are his images clear and to the point, but they supply information which extends beyond the scope of the text. If one were to go so far as to describe Malinowski as the 'better' photographer, would this be a simple consequence of his being the 'better' ethnographer? Was he more accomplished in his use of the medium? Or had anthropology itself changed?

From Malinowski's diaries, it is clear that he took a keen interest in photography. He suggests it served two purposes: ethnographic recording, and a personal point of contact with the outside world: 'I am no longer in love erotically with Z. If I could choose one of them as a companion at present, purely



FIG. 4. Bronislaw Malinowski, *Billy Hancock* (LSE XXV: 12)

impulsively, I would without hesitation choose T. A great part in this is played by the marvellous photos I have taken along' (Malinowski 1967: 64). And again: 'violent surge of longing when I look at her photos.... Strong feeling of her personality' (ibid.: 67). However, for Malinowski the role of photography as a point of contact may have been a two-way process. A number of his photographs had been printed in picture-postcard form, some showing him as a photographer. On a number of occasions Malinowski photographed Billy Hancock, a local trader and close friend. Much of their time together was spent discussing photography, taking photographs, and developing their pictures. In one such instance, Hancock is photographed while taking a photograph of a group of islanders (Fig. 4; XXV: 12).<sup>2</sup> Presumably they then changed places, for in another image Malinowski is seen photographed in the same position (Fig. 5; BXVII: 4). From available evidence, this would seem to fit an occasion mentioned in the diaries when Malinowski casually remarks that he and Billy used up six rolls of film in less than a day (ibid.: 71).

To be photographed 'as a photographer' may also suggest an expression of self-assurance and confidence in his use of the medium (and in Malinowski's case, some might say, his characteristic tendency towards arrogance and narcissism). But there is further evidence of his concern with imagery in his written portrayals of the environment. Not only are they very 'visual', but he uses the terms of pict-

2. The numbers given for Malinowski's photographs refer to the catalogue in the London School of Economics.



FIG. 5. Billy Hancock, *Bronislaw Malinowski* (LSE BXVII: 4)

orial representation: 'the subtle thin line of the horizon breaks up, grows thicker, as though drawn with a blunt pencil' (ibid.: 142). This description is built upon practical foundations, for Malinowski had also made drawings as part of his fieldwork (ibid.: 116). Other descriptions seem to be more evocative of photography: 'the damp velvety sheen of vegetation, the marvellously deep shadows, the freshness of the stones darkened by the rain, the outline of the mountains through the curtains of rain, like shadows of reality projected on the screen of appearances' (ibid.: 90).

These examples serve to indicate a familiarity with the characteristics of visual expression gained through firsthand experience, rather than suggesting that Malinowski's ethnographic photographs are in some way 'picturesque'. Although his method displays concern for the pictorial elements of the photograph, his aim was to fit the significant information efficiently into the frame. Fortunately this did not rely upon rigid formulations, neither of nineteenth-century 'pictorialist' photography, nor of the early editions of *Notes and Queries*.<sup>3</sup>

Malinowski's way of working and process of selection may be established from the photographs used for publication. These may be compared with the other photographs he took on the same particular occasions. For example, the photograph

3. For example, the photographs of E. H. Man. His work is described by Stocking (1987: 259) as representing the 'first fruits' of *Notes and Queries*.

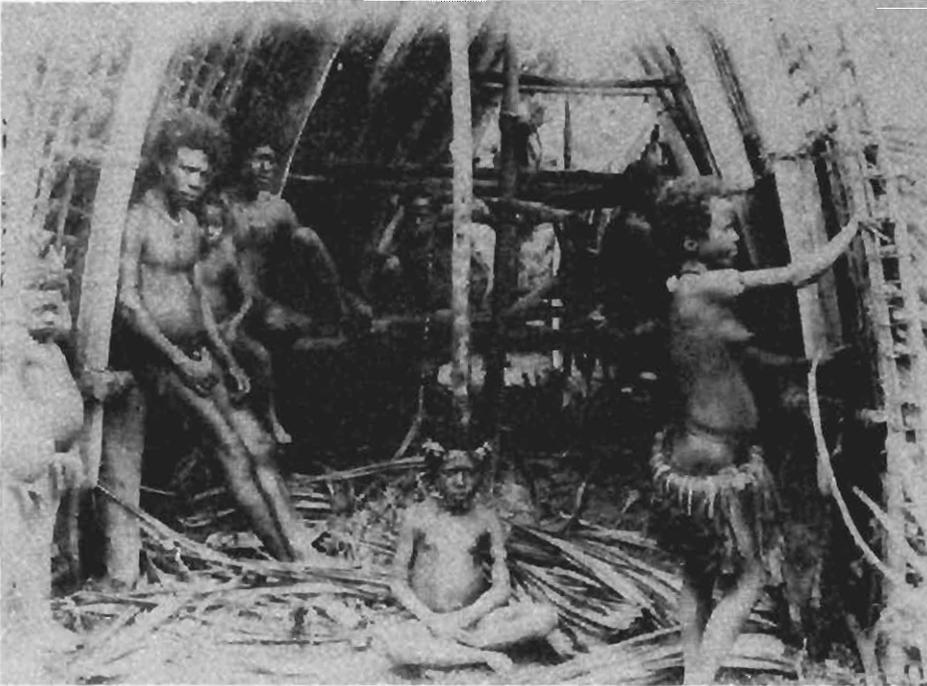


FIG. 6. Bronislaw Malinowski, *House Building* (LSE XXVI: 8)

of 'House Building' in *Coral Gardens and their Magic* (Malinowski 1935: Pl. 92) was taken from a sequence of three (XXVI: 8, 9, 10). From the positions of the people concerned, it seems the photographs were taken in fairly quick succession (Figs. 6, 7 and 8). After the first, he changed camera angle, then took two shots more that are almost identical. The second of the three (Fig. 7; no. 9) was the one used.

While this appears to be typical of his picture-taking,<sup>4</sup> evidence of his photographic technique drawn from the photographs themselves can be reinforced by his diary account. To illustrate this, I cite various entries from which we can build up an impression of his method. First, he 'looked around, noticing things to photograph' (1967: 256). He would then plan his photographs (ibid.: 231) and spend long periods working at them: 'I worked honestly for 3 hours, with camera and notebook, and learned a great deal, lots of concrete details' (ibid.: 217). He would develop and print the film: 'today devoted to photography' (ibid.: 272), occasionally with the assistance of Billy Hancock (ibid.: 182, 221), and then evaluate the results.

4. For other examples, compare 'Working a Shell' and 'Men Holding Amulets (Mwali) on Pole' from *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1920: Plates L, LI, LII, LX) with LSE XIX: 28-30; XIX: 7-8; and 'Fishing' from *Coral Gardens and their Magic* (1935: Plate 5) with LSE XXII:1-5.

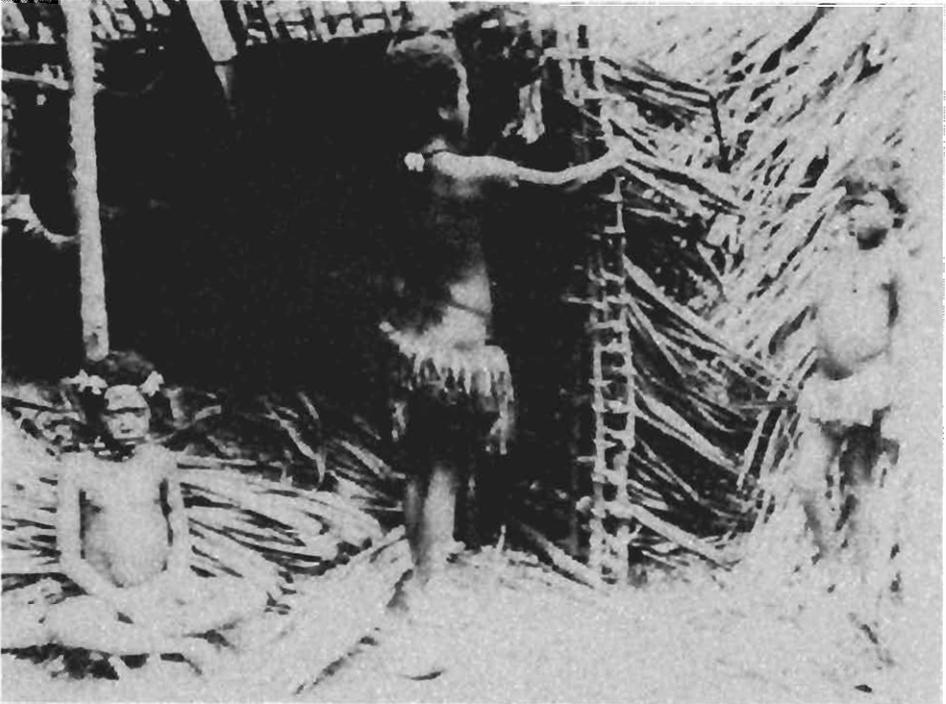


FIG. 7. Bronislaw Malinowski, *House Building* (LSE XXVI: 9)

Sometimes he was 'mortified by the poor results' (ibid.: 195), at others he was delighted to produce 'photographs which are a success!' (ibid.: 237). Although he may have 'wasted time examining Bill's new camera' (ibid.: 275), he knew when to stop: it is 'good for the Ethnographer sometimes to put aside camera, notebook and pencil, and join in himself in what is going on' (1922: 21). Jenness's approach to photography relied upon technology to establish scientific objectivity—later used to illustrate his book. In contrast, Malinowski's images, though impressionistic and at times self-critical, are informative in their embellishment of the text.

With regard to the social role of the anthropologist, Malinowski took a very different approach to that of Jenness, both to missionaries and to government. He maintained that the anthropologist should 'ruthlessly' avoid the mission and government stations and 'live right among the natives' (1932: xvii). And although in this regard he did not necessarily heed his own advice, it does lead directly to Malinowski's criticism of Jenness and Ballantyne. In quoting from their *The Northern D'Entrecasteaux*, he accuses them of 'dangerous and heedless tampering with the one authority that now binds the natives, the one discipline they can be relied upon to observe—that of their own tribal tradition' (1922: 467n.).

The incident concerned the Ulekufugo—a cult which was destroyed by Ballantyne when he removed and accidentally broke the *manumanua* pot which

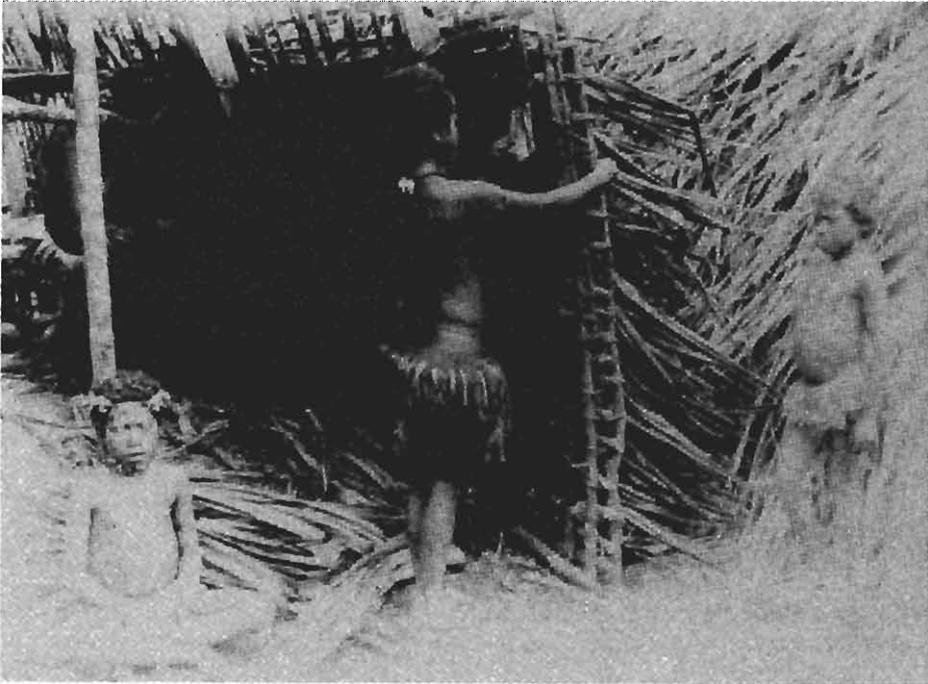


FIG. 8. Bronislaw Malinowski, *House Building* (LSE XXVI: 10)

'ruled the rain and sunshine' and exerted 'its influence in the crops' (Jenness and Ballantyne 1928: 131n.). Young is in accord with this assessment of the function of *manumanua*: 'this ceremony was designed to banish famine and anchor food in the community' (1983: viii). At the least, it would seem very bad luck for all concerned that Ballantyne's breaking of the pot was followed by 'the most disastrous [drought] known for many years' (Jenness: letter to Marett 4 May 1912), and subsequent famine.

#### 4. Conclusion

The differences I have identified between the photographs of Jenness and Malinowski can be accounted for by Malinowski's concern for visual enquiry combined with a more flexible approach to fieldwork.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, Langham

5. Malinowski's interest in visual documentation might also be suggested by his later interest in the Mass Observation Project, to whose founders he gave 'wise advice' (Firth 1957: 7).

(1981: 327), amongst others, has made the suggestion that anthropology itself underwent radical changes during this period:

I would go so far as to suggest that the seminal year for the discipline was not 1922, when *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* and *The Andaman Islanders* were published. Rather it was 1912, when the fourth edition of *Notes and Queries on Anthropology* appeared, containing the brilliant contributions in which Rivers gave the first clear statement of what later came to be identified as the procedural and theoretical basis of British Social Anthropology.

The six editions of *Notes and Queries*, which had a substantial influence upon fieldwork practice, are now particularly valuable as a historical source, reflecting the theories of the many influential figures in British anthropology who contributed in their time (see Coote 1987). The appearance of the 1912 edition of *Notes and Queries* fell between the times of the expeditions of Jenness and Malinowski. The fourth edition of 1912, edited by Barbara Freire-Marreco and John Linton Myres, reflected a radical change in attitude in anthropology, in particular a change from the evolution of religious thought to a new emphasis on kinship and social organization. It also adopted a more professional approach. Much of the first three editions took the form of instructions for amateur collectors of data.

We have firm evidence that both ethnographers used *Notes and Queries* in their fieldwork.<sup>6</sup> From his letters to Marett, we know that Jenness referred to the book. In addition, he found 'Frazer's little book of Queries was immensely useful tho' of course it only supplied broad lines of enquiry' (letter to Marett, 26 July 1912). And Malinowski would compare his photographs to the recommendations of *Notes and Queries* which, in turn, appears to have inspired his photography: 'Read some more N & Q and loaded my camera' (1967: 30). While it may be significant that they were using different editions, the evidence from the photographs themselves suggests that it would be too simplistic to attribute the differences in the photographs exclusively to *Notes and Queries*.<sup>7</sup> The approach to photography developed by Malinowski is entirely in keeping with his methodology of 'participant observation'—clearly distinct from Jenness's attempts to gather evidence for Marett's evolutionism.

For Jenness, while many of the difficulties he encountered in this, his first expedition, could not have been predicted, he seems to have been poorly equipped for any problems that might have arisen. His research conformed to that of the

6. The influence of the 1912 edition on Malinowski has been pointed out by Urry (1972: 52).

7. Not only was Malinowski more prolific in his use of photography—we learn that for a particular trip he took food for six weeks as well as 12 rolls of film and 3 dozen plates (Malinowski 1967: 218), compared with Jenness's initial expedition supply of 'a camera & 2 or 3 dozen plates' (16/12/11). We find Jenness taking the 'orthodox' approach, following closely the recommendations of *Notes and Queries* for dry plates rather than cellulose film in hot climates, whereas Malinowski was prepared to hedge his bets.



FIG. 9. Diamond Jenness, *Man Climbing a Tree, Goodenough Mission*

'old-school' ethnographer, an approach that was soon to be eclipsed by the new social anthropology—of which Malinowski was arguably the founder (Langham 1981). Jenness, with prescribed methods and rigid objectives, seemed to lack the flexibility that would enable him to cope with novel or difficult situations. In particular, this is reflected in his use of photography. Guided by an aim for clearly defined types of pictures, his camera imposed a structure on the subject, with little room to explore it or let it determine the image in any way. Yet further, his photographs reveal a photographer detached from his subject: usually taken from a distance, his images show little evidence of intimacy or involvement (Fig. 9).

Of course, the techniques of anthropological fieldwork have advanced considerably over the last seventy years. Yet in spite of the changes in photographic technology, the photographs of Diamond Jenness are neither better, nor worse, than those of many contemporary anthropologists. So, to be fair to Jenness, I should allow him the last word. In a letter to Marett written on 21st February 1919 he wrote: 'the work I did in the Arctic had made me realize how much I had left undone in Papua, how much better the report might have been if only I had known how to set about the fieldwork. I ought to have obtained more information, more knowledge of the natives....'

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## DO MAMBILA COCKERELS LAY EGGS? REFLECTIONS ON KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEF

DAVID ZEITLYN

MANY beliefs are labile, or peripheral, invoked but never explored, let alone examined systematically. The besetting sin of anthropology is to misplace concretism (Bateson 1980: 263), and this is a particular danger when dealing with beliefs. Our very practice tends to make things precise and delimited: we write them down, and then tease at our writings to 'make sense' of them. The real challenge of anthropology, it seems to me, is to record things in a way that remains faithful to the volatility of what we are describing.

In Cameroon, the Mambila with whom I work talk of the *cho* snake that lives in rivers and pools, the sight of which brings death. This snake is said to 'blow the rainbow', a statement for which I could elicit no further explanation. The neighbouring Tikar (according to a personal communication from their ethnographer, David Price) say that rainbows are the reflection of a snake. Mambila also maintain that in caves, behind waterfalls and at the bottom of ravines live *tanyi*, goat-like animals, which like witches can metamorphose themselves, usually in order to ensnare unsuspecting people. *Tanyi* attract unwary lone travellers. Both the *cho* snake and the *tanyi* figure as characters in stories told at beer drinks. For example, a man told of a journey he made to Nigeria one dry season during which he went into a cave. He said that a *tanyi* lived in that cave during the rainy season. No one asked how he established this fact.

A further example is the Mambila belief that cockerels lay eggs. I never suspected them of holding such a belief, and I think I would still be blissfully untroubled had David Price not prompted me to ask an explicit question when I

returned to the field in 1990. Price's fieldwork was carried out in Ngambe among the neighbouring Tikar people. Among another neighbouring group, the Konja, some men also made the same claim, but I have not, as yet, been able to explore the Tikar or Konja elaborations.

Mambila, Tikar and Konja share a propositional belief that happens to be false. As such, it is on a par with claims about the existence of phlogiston, unicorns or the philosophers' stone. What is curious is that it seems to be fairly open to empirical refutation, although Lewis (1980) points to some of the ways in which this may be harder than it first appears. Our stumbling-block is our image of the scientific tradition. Mundane beliefs seem to report 'facts' which could be scientifically tested. Yet Lewis's Gnau do not sit in hides watching birds to see if they die natural deaths. Similarly, Mambila do not watch their chickens to see which bird lays what egg, nor do they dissect cockerels to establish whether they are capable of such a feat. Moreover, our belief in rare and strange (unfamiliar) objects is no different from the Mambila belief in *tanyi*. When I tell Mambila friends that a hundred years ago there were manatee in the River Mbam (possibly) or in the River Sanaga (certainly), the basis for my confidence is, on reflection, extremely slender.

When I asked an explicit question, being long-winded to be sure I was being fully understood, the answers I got were of the following form:

DZ: 'Chickens are of two sorts, female and male, hens and cockerels that crow in the mornings. Hens lay eggs, I know, but I do not know if cockerels too can lay eggs.'

Mambila: 'Oh yes, cockerels lay eggs, but small ones. You can eat them if you like, but what you should do is to weave a small basket, put the egg in it and then hang the basket at a crossroads. Then your chickens will grow well and fat and not die and they will lay many eggs.'

Most people expressed uncertainty about birds in the wild. I talked about this to two brothers (both in their twenties), one of whom keeps pigeons. They agreed that male pigeons don't lay eggs. The younger brother then said that neither do cockerels. Before I could say anything, his elder brother corrected him: 'Small eggs are cockerels' eggs.' Eggs laid without shells are described with the same terms as those used for miscarriages. Both are before term and are 'unripe'. However, cockerels' eggs are different: although small they are perfectly formed.

To the best of my knowledge it is physically impossible for male birds of any species to lay eggs, though I must confess that since a doubt was raised in my mind I have subsequently confirmed this with some friends in the Oxford zoology faculty. Granted this, two explanations are possible: (1) there are no such eggs, and no one has ever seen them nor put them in baskets as described above; (2) some aberrant hens' eggs are regarded as 'cockerels' eggs' by Mambila and are given the treatment described above.

Mambila hens are free-range, preyed upon by kites, sparrow-hawks and eagles, and prone to a wide variety of illnesses that can reach epidemic proportions. Eggs

are taken by egg-eating snakes and perhaps by small rodents. There is also a wide variety of ritual uses for chicks and chickens, quite apart from mere domestic consumption. In sum, a chicken's life is fraught with uncertainty. We are far from the farmyard inductive certainties described by Bertrand Russell (1991 [1912]: 35). The source of any eggs that may be found is also far from clear. Hence cockerels are viable candidates for the unusual source of abnormally small eggs.

On the one hand there are mythical creatures: the dwarfs, hobgoblins, extra-terrestrials and hobbits of folklore. Beliefs such as these, like the dragon described by Sperber (1982), may be consigned to a category of travellers' tales, or 'semi-propositional representations' (in Sperber's terms). This means that they occur in talk (or other actions, for one can go out to hunt for golden-hearted dragons, or golden fleeces). They are propositional in form but stand for a range of propositions, rather than implying a single proposition. For the present it suffices to note that the way in which these beliefs are used resembles the use of religious concepts. They are alike at least in so far as both are protected from immediate empirical testing. The protection is achieved not so much in the manner described by Evans-Pritchard for Zande divination (1937: 475-8) but by the conversational context: you don't argue with a story (with apologies to Maurice Bloch (1974)). Hard questioning of such stories only occurs when an ethnographer is present. Otherwise, scepticism expresses unfriendliness and a disinclination to continue the conversation. Any scepticism that may be expressed is not taken up and disseminated. The existence of mythical creatures is more newsworthy than their non-existence.

Thus for mythical beings. But, on the other hand, a few authors (such as those mentioned below) have discussed problems arising from the examination of more mundane beliefs. These are generally of the form 'the Y people believe that X'. The problems are similar to those that arise in the analysis of religion but may be seen more clearly when separated from some of the different and similarly complex problems attendant upon the discussion of religion *per se*. Religious beliefs are doubly questionable. There is uncertainty about how we should best seek to understand religion, quite apart from the problems with belief itself.

A good example of the analysis of a mundane belief is to be found in Lewis's discussion of the belief held by the Gnau in New Guinea that birds do not die natural deaths. This is, of course, identical in kind to a widely held belief that all human death is caused by witchcraft, so that in the absence of malevolent human action no one would die. More prosaic is the claim that the life of birds has no natural limit (one made implicitly by the Gnau). Lewis (1980: 137-8) has described his reactions on discovering that Gnau hold that birds do not die 'natural' deaths:

I treasure the feeling of discovery I had then for three reasons. Firstly, I had presumed that something was as obvious to them as it was to me and I was wrong. Yet I had lived with them more than two years without finding out so great a difference in the answers we would give to that question. Secondly, had you asked

me before whether I thought a particular people might have no fixed or sure answer to the question, I would have supposed it most unlikely. 'Do birds and animals die?' does not seem a question that would be left unsettled in the general knowledge provided in some culture. Two years passed until chance revealed it to me. Thirdly, the contrast between plants and animals which some people stressed led me to make clearer a distinction I was half aware of...Gnau men and women see some wild creature, it moves, is gone, and who can tell the next time whether it is the same one or another like it? Some say those creatures all must die, some say not, others are not sure.

Any dead birds which may be found are explained as having been killed. Death has external causes and is adventitious.

Gell (1975) mentions the way shadows in the forest may be seen as spirits (he thought he saw a knight in armour). A recent work of Sperber's (1982) considers the existence of dragons with golden hearts. Liam Hudson (1972) reminds us that if we accept the existence of the rhinoceros it is hard to be complacent in denying the existence of the unicorn. I read in *New Scientist* that strange new creatures have been found in the depths of the Atlantic. By accepting these reports I incorporate these creatures as part of my knowledge, accepting it as knowledge by authority.<sup>1</sup>

Anthropologists have had a long-standing fascination with beliefs that they deem to be peculiar or irrational. The whole notion of belief itself has been discussed from a variety of different standpoints. Philosophers make two useful distinctions when considering this subject: first, the difference between the objects of belief and 'what [native speakers] mean by the word that the [anthropologist] translates as "belief"' (Quine 1990: 116); second is the distinction between believing *in* something, and believing *that* something (Price 1969).<sup>2</sup> These two distinctions are particularly germane when we examine the literature discussing the perplexities of religion. Abstract and abstruse notions have been exhaustively examined, including such arcane matters as the putative identity of twins and birds among the Nuer (Evans-Pritchard 1956) and the numerologically satisfying and mythically complete account of the origin of the world and its contents as given by some Dogon (Griaule 1965). The question is, how should we analyse beliefs that seem to us to be empirically false?

1. Russell (1991) used the phrase 'knowledge by description' to contrast with knowledge by acquaintance, which is the results of our own experience. I prefer to use 'knowledge by authority' since it emphasizes the social factors involved in accepting a description as being authoritative, i.e. true! Anthropologists may still wonder if such a distinction underestimates the extent that people learn (from within a culture) to understand their own experiences. I share this unease but feel that at a crude level the distinction may be a helpful one.

2. This distinction is finer than it may seem at first sight (as Price illustrates). To believe *that* Jesus Christ was the Son of God is little different from believing *in* him.

Despite the caveats raised by Needham (1972) I continue to use the term 'belief'. Intentionality cannot be removed by taking a leaf from Wittgenstein's book and demonstrating the lack of clear definition for the English word 'belief'. As an analytic term it may not be the best: psychologists and philosophers often use 'intentional states' and 'representations' (which may be little improvement over 'belief' except that they are less likely to be confused with English folk concepts). Yet other cultures may have concepts that are well translated by 'belief'. Like all translations, particularly those made by anthropologists, hedges and qualifiers will be added. 'Belief' remains as a possible term for use in translation. In particular, we must beware of two stereotypes that have distorted the anthropological study of belief and belief systems. They are The Creed and the products of scientific experiment (and scientific theories based on such experiments). Both are supreme creations of an idiosyncratic literate tradition that is historically specific and not generalizable without detailed argument. The latter is all too often lacking. The Creed is an explicit statement of the content of the beliefs that constitute a particular variety of Christianity. It gives the misleading impression that the contents of belief of other religions can also be specified. Similarly, the products of science, such as may be found in any textbook, give a misleading idea of certainty and of the possibility of precise, justifiable description.

It is still worth recalling Horton's point (1967) that we all use 'traditional' thought or 'traditional beliefs' in our everyday life. It is hard work to act as an empirical scientist, and our best practitioners manage it for a very small part of their lives. We believe, and we recount what we have been told is true; and we make no attempt whatsoever to verify that information, even if the means to verify it may be readily at hand.

After further enquiry and reflection I am no more perplexed that Mambila believe that cockerels lay eggs than I am that a British Prime Minister can describe Britain as the world's first democracy, or that Dan Quayle expected Latin to be spoken in Latin America. Accepting the assurances of colleagues in the Oxford zoology department that cockerels cannot lay eggs, I now tend to explain that what Mambila call cockerels' eggs are aberrantly small hens' eggs. The basis of this prosaic explanation is that the first egg laid by a broody hen is occasionally abnormally small. Also, a cockerel may lead a hen to lay in a nest, sometimes settling in first, as if to show the way. The combination of these two observations seems to be sufficient to explain a belief that cockerels lay eggs.

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**JOHN HUGH MARSHALL BEATTIE  
1915-1990**

**MEMORIAL ADDRESS**

JOHN BEATTIE enjoyed a long and distinguished academic career. He possessed a number of attractive qualities and an endearing personality that radiated warmth and kindness. A number of friends and acquaintances from different walks of life, not least students of social anthropology and sociology, were irresistibly drawn to him and influenced by his ideas and way of thinking. We in this commemorative gathering are here really to celebrate John Beattie's life, which had many facets to it; and the richness of which, in a profound sense, became accessible to a wide variety of individuals.

John Beattie was born in 1915 in County Wicklow in Ireland. The sudden death of his father when John was hardly two and a half years old perhaps gave him a sense of insecurity. He had, however, a highly developed sense of his Irish identity that he carefully but unobtrusively nurtured in later life with frequent visits to Ireland. Despite his high academic achievement at school, he was a relatively late developer; his initial interest in theology when he first entered Trinity College, Dublin, subsequently gave way to a more sustained engagement with philosophy.

As a student he felt attracted to the work of Immanuel Kant. He was deeply impressed by Kant's concept of the categorical imperative, and perhaps also by the fact that Kant was one of the few philosophers to show an awareness of anthropology as an academic field of inquiry. It would be fair to say that throughout his career as a social anthropologist John Beattie bore the mark of the early influence exercised on his mind by Kant. His undergraduate career was highly successful, culminating in the award, for his work in mental and moral

Text of an address delivered at the Memorial Service for John Beattie held at St Cross Church, Oxford on Saturday, 7th July 1990. All John Beattie's publications mentioned specifically here are included in the Select Bibliography provided below.

philosophy, of the only gold medal of the year given to an honours graduate in philosophy.

John's choice of career had a vocational aspect to it. After he obtained his honours degree, it was open to him to compete for either the Indian Civil Service or the Colonial Civil Service. In the event, it was the Colonial Civil Service that he decided to take up. It was not going to be just a career as far as he was concerned. It was in some vague, as yet undefined sense, a kind of dedication. His approach to it was whole-hearted, imbued with the liberal spirit in the finest sense of the term; the humanitarian appeal of serving in Africa far outweighed the administrative attractions of exercising authority and control over the lives of remote peoples.

On his selection to the Colonial Civil Service, John—along with several others who, like him, were to branch out in subsequent decades into an academic career in social anthropological studies—joined the Colonial Administrative Service. (This was just before the outbreak of the Second World War.) His philosophical bent of mind, influenced as we have already noted by his Kantian interests, was for the first time exposed, during the training provided by the Colonial Administrative Service course at Oxford, to lectures in the discipline of social anthropology given to the Colonial Civil Service cadets by Radcliffe-Brown and Meyer Fortes.

Of the majestic theoretical sweep that Radcliffe-Brown brought to the subject and the rigorous and 'dense ethnographic texture' of Fortes's material derived from his researches among the Tallensi, John felt the attractions of the latter to be novel in character and immediately relevant to the task of understanding the peoples among whom he was going to work. It would be reasonable to guess that during this brief exposure to applied social anthropology John grasped the equal importance of theory and fieldwork in social anthropology and the need to link them together in order to provide a rich and reliable understanding of any society.

The year 1939-40 at Oxford was also remarkable for another development. It was during that year that John met Honor, his future wife; his relationship with her was to become the fulcrum of his life. Her musical interests—she was a highly respected musician and had a distinguished career teaching the cello—stimulated his cultural interests. Their relationship remained very close indeed until Honor's sudden and tragic death twelve years ago.

John returned from Tanganyika in 1946 to marry Honor. Until then he had served in the Lake Province (in Sukumaland) in various administrative capacities. Returning to Tanganyika with Honor, he worked in Tunduru in the Southern Province. The first phase of what promised to be a very successful career indeed ended with a posting in the Secretariat in Dar es Salaam where he assumed some of the departmental duties in the sphere of 'African Affairs'. He thus became aware of Tanganyika's budding nationalist movement and the aspirations of the rising Tanganyikan élite.

It is worth remembering, however, that both Honor and John belonged to a rare breed of European civil servant. In their personal conduct with ordinary African people they treated them with dignity and respect without ever imposing

themselves on them. In fact, they were self-effacing to the highest extent possible, given the high-profile exposure to which John was inevitably subjected as a white colonial administrator. There were a number of incidents in which John's fundamental respect for African people was evident. On one occasion, a zealous African subordinate came to see him (John was the District Officer) to report that a group of men were having a marijuana-smoking party in the village and to seek orders as to what should be done about it. It was entirely in keeping with John's attitude of 'live and let live' that he apparently said, 'No, they're not making trouble; so I think we can safely leave them to get on with it.'

During his first Dar es Salaam stint, John Beattie was also asked to assume the clerkship of the Legislative and Executive Councils. This post carried considerable prestige and responsibility. It also held great potential for promotion. However, during the first long overseas leave accumulated after his marriage, John sought permission to attend a full year's course (1949-50) at Oxford reading social anthropology. The department was buzzing with intellectual activity, and its young members' research interests reached out to the field in numerous far-flung lands.

A year devoted to study in Oxford also catered for Honor's professional interests. At the time, Oxford happened to be a place very much to her liking in an emotional, personal sense. It thus provided a most agreeable setting in which John imbibed the discipline in stimulating company and ventured forth to take a look at the wider theoretical shores of the discipline as it then was. Thus, he even referred to Lévi-Strauss's work on kinship in one of his examination answers.

Not surprisingly, a fruitful year in Oxford led to a decision to resign from the Colonial Civil Service in order to pursue further research in social anthropology at Oxford under the guidance of Professor Evans-Pritchard. In subsequent years, John Beattie and Professor Evans-Pritchard became very intimately associated in the teaching and research work of the department, though from different and independent inter-disciplinary positions of strength.

John did his fieldwork among the Nyoro people in Bunyoro in Uganda. As in his marriage, so too in the intellectual sphere, he gave throughout his career constancy of devotion, respect, concern and loyalty to the people whom he chose to study. About Nyoro society, John wrote a number of research papers (some of them highly distinguished); a non-specialist book giving a general introduction to the society, entitled *Bunyoro: An African Kingdom*; a teaching text entitled *Understanding an African Kingdom: Bunyoro*; and an important anthropological treatise on *The Nyoro State* that was to be followed by two further treatises, one on Nyoro law and the other on Nyoro culture, neither of which, sadly, have seen the light of day.

His general orientation to the subject was as significant as the weight and quality of his published contributions. His work among the Bunyoro as an anthropologist, as indeed his administrative career among the Tanganyikan peoples, was motivated by two considerations that were linked together into a unified methodology in his work as a whole. He had a firmly rooted belief in a common humanity and in the importance of reason in understanding human problems; at the

same time, he had the conviction that when it comes to explaining why so-called 'primitive' peoples are animated by beliefs and rituals that seem extraordinary to us, we ought to understand these activities as in no way a kind of mistaken science attributable to their stupidity or irrationality, but rather as activities comparable to art, music or drama in our own 'complex' society, activities performed for their own sake and not for any immediate result that might be expected to accrue.

This viewpoint is clearly stated in a celebrated essay of his published in *Man* in 1966 entitled 'Ritual and Social Change'. Perhaps it is worth pointing out that John's philosophical training and identification with the Kantian world-view led him, as a fieldworker, to look for the 'universal' in the 'local' and, in particular, to look for local expressions of universally comparable capacities of human experience. He believed that it made more sense to see 'ritual' as 'art' rather than 'science', because in this way we are able to emphasize the idea of a common humanity. By the same token, he was not concerned to force his understanding of the Nyoro society into some purely abstract theoretical mould; rather, his aim was to comprehend as fully as possible the complexity of Nyoro culture by focusing on a variety of aspects of it—the richness of Nyoro proverbs and the ambiguities of belief implied in the Nyoro spirit possession cult, to cite only two examples.

One of John's great academic strengths lay in his capacity to communicate his understanding of society in a lucid, direct and well-crafted manner. He attached equal importance to research and to teaching, to doing his own research and to guiding the research of postgraduate students. He greatly enjoyed teaching undergraduates and had the capacity to pitch his lectures at a level that kept up the interest of bright students without losing those who were not so bright. His *Other Cultures* achieved considerable success as a textbook for undergraduates; it has been translated into numerous languages in different parts of the world and has been re-published several times and continues to this day to be an excellent introduction to comparative social anthropology. John's skill as a communicator also enabled him to take part, in an effective way, in the anthropological debate on how we should understand ritual. He contributed several articles in this area, dealing with complex arguments in a subtle manner.

John was an excellent person to work with. He was gentle and warm, entirely without aggression, always ready to be more than fair to his adversary, and generous to a fault in his dealings with others; nor did he push his views at the expense of those of others. He brought out the best in his research students and greatly enjoyed his tutorial relationships, in which he stressed the importance of keeping ethnographic evidence always in focus. He attracted a large number of research students even in retirement, and guided the research work of many African students, some of whom have written extremely perceptive studies on East African topics.

John's students and colleagues not only respected him but also developed a real affection towards him. He lectured in the Institute of Social Anthropology for twenty years before taking up the Chair of African Studies at the University of

Leiden in 1971. Throughout his career he was much sought after as a visiting professor and visiting scholar by many universities and institutes of advanced study in Africa, North America, Europe and Israel. He was also in great demand as an external examiner for degrees from undergraduate to doctoral level, in Britain as well as abroad, a task to which he invariably brought a nice combination of fairness and sympathy.

Events following the military coup in Uganda in 1971 made it difficult for him to keep in touch with his East African friends (especially those in Bunyoro and those with whom he had worked closely during his brief directorship of the East African Institute of Social Research in the early 1950s). This was a matter of great sadness to him. By the time political tensions began to ease in the mid-1980s (from 1986 to be precise), physical decline had already begun to set in and he was in no position to contemplate a journey to East Africa.

John's passions were by no means restricted to the academic sphere. He developed a deep personal commitment to the people of Bunyoro and to the cause of the 'Lost Kingdom', which received a rough deal from the colonial over-rulers and the neighbouring kingdom of Buganda alike. He showed his concern for the younger generation of the Banyoro by taking a keen interest in the education and welfare of a number of Banyoro children to which he contributed in a spirit of quiet generosity. He would invariably request those friends of his who visited Bunyoro to take something for the young people there in whose welfare he was interested and to bring back news of their educational and personal progress.

John had a number of interests other than his interest in books and ideas. Endowed with a robust constitution, he loved to walk and to go on mountaineering expeditions in East Africa. In his retirement he walked a few times in the Yorkshire dales, but he walked and climbed regularly in the hills of his own native land of County Wicklow. His love of Ireland did not prevent his realising that he could not make it his permanent home, even as his reservations about life in England did not prevent him from making it his home either. In true Irish spirit he loved Irish literature, and especially poetry. He was fond of W. B. Yeats's poems, many of which he knew by heart. The ambivalence that he felt about England and Ireland was reflected in his preference for the great poet's outpourings about the tension of being an Irishman in England. John was particularly fond of Yeats's poem 'An Irish Airman Foresees His Death', which contains the lines: 'Those that I fight I do not hate, / Those that I guard I do not love'.

John's distinguishing characteristic was his gentle and unobtrusive personality. He never raised his profile in any controversy, though he always stood his ground with intelligence and tenacity. He had a finely balanced nature, combining the Apollonian with the Dionysian elements of his make-up in amusing and intelligent ways. Yet, on balance, he was a Dionysian at heart. He enjoyed the pleasures of life, if sometimes in a quiet and recessive manner, always delighting in sharing his joys with friends. His hospitality was always freely given and he was frequently visited by scholars from different continents. He was a sociable, energetic, kindly, humorous, sensitive and intelligent person. At his best, he reached out to others

in his own generous manner. He loved to paint, and could have made a decent living at it if he had chosen to become an artist. His oils and watercolours have a professional flair about them. He had a mordant sense of humour, which he expressed through the vehicle of caricature; a number of 'outlandishly amusing and bizarre' cartoons are extant in the collections of his friends. I remember him drawing some of these extremely complicated pictures on the backs of cigarillo packets to great effect at conferences, often to relieve the tedium of having to listen to boring and mediocre papers.

John never fully recovered from Honor's death. He did try to return to normal teaching and guidance of research, but it did not last for more than five or six years. He could not complete his agenda of publication for the two volumes on Nyoro culture and Nyoro law for which the ethnographic material was ready. This will remain a loss to the literature on East Africa.

When the end came it was swift. At last, on Good Friday 1990, John Beattie 'drifted out of harbour on a silent tide', a peaceful end to a distinguished and dignified but quiet career: 'The curtain of your life was drawn / Sometime between despair and dawn.' A rich and sociable life, lived at a number of different levels in a number of different places over an extremely interesting span of history reflecting the destinies of colonizing and colonized countries, thus came to an end.

We are here to pay tribute to a 'good, honourable, and gentle' scholar who will be remembered for a long time as 'a thinker of the middle way', and above all to a beloved and much missed friend, parent and relative whose passing has impoverished our lives.

T. V. SATHYAMURTHY

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Compiled by Hugh Beattie and Jeremy Coote

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### **J. H. M. BEATTIE AND THE OUAS**

Professor Beattie's long association with anthropology at Oxford, as described by Dr Sathyamurthy in his Memorial Address above, is well reflected in the record of his involvement with the University's Anthropological Society. He served as its President twice: from 1961 to 1962 (and thereafter as an active, though occasionally apologetic member of the Society's committee) and then for a two-year period from 1979 to 1981.

Surprisingly, he addressed the Society only once, at its 519th meeting on 17 November 1954 in the University Museum, when he took as his subject 'Spirit Possession in Bunyoro', a topic to which he was to return time and again in his academic publications. According to the minutes of the meeting, John's 'vivid analysis'—as it was described by John Peristiany, who led 'a lively discussion' that followed—was received with acclamation.

During his second stint as President, John presided over a renaissance in the Society's activities, after a rather moribund phase it had gone through in the 1970s. This period in the Society's history will be remembered with pleasure by all who attended its meetings at the time. John's good nature and humour saw the Society through a remarkable series of technical mishaps with tape recorders and slide and film projectors; indeed, anything that could go wrong did go wrong. His hospitality ensured, however, that even on the most wintry of evenings (and even on those summery ones when Oxford offers many other attractions) a large audience turned up at the Pitt Rivers Museum's green hut and later at the Linacre College lecture room, for the fortnightly meeting. Looking back over the records of that time one is struck by the variety of speakers and topics that John organized for our entertainment. It was, perhaps, never knowing quite what to expect—apart from technical mishaps—that made those meetings so popular.

With Professor Beattie's death the Society has lost one of its most senior members. It takes this opportunity of joining with John's many friends and colleagues, both here and abroad, in conveying its condolences to his family.

JEREMY COOTE  
Hon. Sec., OUAS, 1980-1981

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## CONTRIBUTIONS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF GHENT

### INTRODUCTION

RIK PINXTEN

THIS collection of essays reflects some of the research now being carried out in the departments of anthropology, African studies and ethnic art at the University of Ghent in Belgium. Due to limitations of space, however, the collection is not wholly representative for any of the three departments in themselves. Rather, it cuts across all three of them.

The structure of what can be identified as 'anthropological research' at the University of Ghent has particular historical roots. Although the university was the first in Belgium to teach anthropology, beginning with Frans Olbrechts in the 1920s, its programme has been dispersed over the years between art history/ethnic art and philosophy-inspired African studies. Anthropology proper, the third partner in this case, has had the status of an auxiliary science for most of this century. This structure compares with that of some German institutes, but it contrasts markedly with the British and American systems. The intriguing, sometimes fruitful and sometimes harassing investment in art history proper (for ethnic art) and in philosophy and cultural history proper (for African studies) forces the anthropologist to work in an interdisciplinary way. On the other hand, the reference to sociology, found so often in Great Britain, is absent.

Contributions from all three 'sources' are presented in this collection. Moreover, it will be clear that each contributor situates himself in more than one discipline. Verboven and Pinxten speak as anthropologists, but both lay emphasis on religious studies. Verboven, who was trained in ethnic art, works on African religions. Pinxten, who was trained as a philosopher and is an Americanist

anthropologist by vocation, presents a study in theoretical anthropology. Both authors develop praxiological models, drawing mainly on Bourdieu's work.

Remes is trained in African linguistics and is presently studying for a Ph.D. in the Department of Anthropology at Northwestern University, Chicago, USA. He thus bridges African linguistics and anthropology. His essay is a sociolinguistic analysis of the contemporary Afro-American phenomenon of rapping music. Arnaut, who was trained in ethnic art and who is now carrying out postgraduate research in social and cultural anthropology at the University of Oxford, has been trying to capture the core of 'Africanhood' in terms of rhythm, dance and music. His present contribution continues this intuitive quest and expands it to the problematization of African art. Finally, Van Damme offers an overview and critical appraisal of theories about the aesthetics of non-Western cultures. The essay combines art-historical interests and anthropological literature in an attempt to check critically our interdisciplinary understanding of the subject-matter.

We hope that this selection from anthropological work at the University of Ghent will be inspiring to the reader, and that it may help to establish further contacts between us and our fellow anthropologists.

## SPACE, TIME AND BODILINESS IN DOGON FUNERALS: A PRAXIOLOGICAL VIEW

DIRK VERBOVEN

### *Introduction*

THROUGHOUT this essay, space, time, and bodiliness are considered as the main vehicles for constructing ritual meaning. Tracing back praxiology to one of its main roots, the French *Année* school, I first discuss bodily and spatial ritual behaviours and how they relate to meaning construction. Secondly, I discuss temporal aspects of ritual praxis, both syntactically (the notion of a processual development of rituals) and semantically (the notion of context, i.e. the ritual as a historically situated performance). In a third section—also to a large degree indebted to the *Année* school—I show how the general patterning of funerary ritual affects the meaning of its constituent parts, and how this allows for the structural meaning of the Dogon funeral. The ultimate aim, however, is to proceed to an alternative praxiological interpretation of the Dogon funeral, which I confront with the socio-structural interpretation of Barbara DeMott (1982).

### 1. *The Human Body, Spatial Thresholds and Boundary-Transgression in a Ritual Context*

The notion of the body is commonplace in anthropology today (e.g. Blacking 1977), but already in 1936 Mauss had published an interesting essay on bodily

techniques (Mauss 1950; Eng. transl. 1979). It remained unnoticed, however, for a long time, although it obviously influenced Bourdieu's *'théorie de la pratique'* (Bourdieu 1980). For Mauss, bodily techniques are understood as 'les façons dont les hommes, société par société, d'une façon traditionnelle, savent se servir de leur corps' (Mauss 1950: 365).<sup>1</sup> This socially determined habitus (ibid.: 368; the terminology may be compared interestingly with Bourdieu's) is not in the first instance an individual way of behaving, but expresses a social belonging: 'elles varient surtout avec les sociétés, les éducations, les convenances et les modes, les prestiges. Il faut y voir des techniques et l'ouvrage de la *raison pratique* collective et individuelle' (ibid.: 369, my emphasis).<sup>2</sup> If we add a Marxist dimension to Mauss's statement—for example, the concepts of 'class', economic determinism and 'collective misjudgement'—we are already very close to Bourdieu's *'sens pratique'*. Habitus is, according to Mauss, imposed by education and not primarily by imitation. Bourdieu translates this statement into his idiom of the 'incorporation' of the habitus and adds the Weberian notions of 'authority' and 'legitimation'. Two variables seem to determine, for Mauss, the differences of habitus, viz. gender and age (ibid.: 373), discussed respectively in Chapters 2 and 3 of his essay; everywhere we come across hints and insights that have been taken up and elaborated by Bourdieu.

Independently from Bourdieu, Devisch (1984) has developed a comparable body-centred outlook on cultural phenomena. What is remarkable is that his approach—as well as Bourdieu's—seems to have been developed primarily within, that is, as a reaction against, French structuralism. Devisch considers the body as a dynamic unity in space and time that actively interiorizes (through participation in activities) and exteriorizes (through activity in the world) a social and cosmological world-view. Perhaps one of the most marked aspects of orthodox structuralist theory is the use of binary oppositions in cultural analysis, the basic opposition being the nature/culture opposition in all its more specific variations (raw/cooked, female/male etc.). However, more important than these static oppositions are the continual dynamic transgressions between them, that involve concrete bodily actions (such as cooking and sexuality). In addition, these practices are often ritualized, or more generally, they involve certain cultural codes. This 'ternary logic', as it could be called to distinguish it from its binary counterpart, is present implicitly in Lévi-Straussian structuralism. But while Lévi-Strauss is mainly concerned with logico-cognitive boundary transgressions, these are correlated by both Bourdieu and Devisch with concrete bodily activities and the social and cosmological world they 'embody'. Both call themselves

1. '...the ways in which from society to society men know how to use their bodies' (Mauss 1979: 101).

2. '...they vary especially between societies, educations, properties and fashions, prestiges. In them we should see the techniques and work of collective and individual *practical reason*' (Mauss 1979: 101; my emphasis).

'praxiologists' because concrete practices rather than mental categories are their focus of observation and interpretation.

Within this 'oppositional thinking', rituals are conceived of, first, as procedures for creating or (re)emphasizing existing (social) oppositions, and, secondly, as means of mediating or transgressing oppositions or dissolving contradictions that are inherent aspects of their arbitrariness. To make this general discussion somewhat more concrete, I shall now examine two proposals more closely.

Devisch's semantic praxiology is the more explicit with respect to bodiliness. The structuralist heritage is acknowledged in his 'Beyond a Structural Approach to Therapeutic Efficacy' (1983). His main criticism of structural approaches relates to their dualism: they are insensitive to cultural practices as generative, self-contained processes, but instead explain them by reference to some other underlying code, such as formal and logical structures (Lévi-Strauss) or social structures (Turner). Devisch (the key reference here is 1984) tries to capture the auto-generative processes of cultural practices by concentrating on aspects of bodiliness as the main metaphor and referent in cultural symbolization. Underlying the conceptualization of the body-self, bodily functions and activities, the body in social interaction with others, and the body as a micro-metaphor of the world-view, we can discover a great number of cultural encoding orders (cf. Turner's 'root metaphors' (1974)) that are often based on relational, spatial or orientational metaphors (cf. Lakoff and Johnson's 'ontological metaphors' (1980)), thus encoding meaning in terms of up/down, in/out, front/back, on/off, central/peripheral, linear/circular and vertical/horizontal. These spatial metaphors are, according to Devisch, 'transferred' to such other domains as bodily functions and activities (e.g. ingestion, sexuality, commensality...) and life-cycle events (e.g. rites of passage). In combination with the model of metaphorical consonance between the bodily, the social, and the cosmological—inspired by Douglas (1976)—an integrated study of the relevant dimensions of culture becomes possible.

Bourdieu, especially in his *Le Sens pratique* (1980), is somewhat less concrete concerning the bodily referents of his theoretical framework, but he nevertheless qualifies his outlook on culture as an 'almost corporeal view of the world' (ibid.: 111).<sup>3</sup> Bodily actions interiorize or exteriorize 'a limited set of principles which are practically coherent' (ibid.: 125) and are representative of a particular socio-economic field (*champ*). In other words, a certain *croyance pratique* constitutes, and is constitutive of, the belonging to a certain field. The most apparent socio-economic division is the one between the sexes; it has a bodily foundation and is the fundamental principle underpinning the division of labour. In the symbolic associations established mainly on the basis of the male-female opposition, the body—with its properties and movements—functions as an 'analogical operator establishing all kinds of practical equivalences between the various divisions of the social world' (ibid.: 120).

3. Unless indicated otherwise all translations into English are mine.

These general principles concerning bodiliness can be translated into ritual behaviour and its symbolic meaning (the key reference here being *ibid.*: 333-439). The logical principles underlying practice are expressed in ritual through bodily actions: 'ritual gestures...translate into unthinking movements, turning right or left, entering or leaving, turning upside down, tying and cutting, the most characteristic operations of ritual logic, unite, separate, transfer, reverse' (*ibid.*: 362). The central concern of cultural world-views is the establishment of order in the apparently chaotic world, but any ordering necessarily implies the introduction of distinctions between two opposed but complementary opposites. Thus, the pre-eminently cultural act is the *arbitrary* introduction of conceptual *limits*, and the 'function' of, for example, rites of passage and ritual in general concerns the *legitimate transgression* of these limits. The most basic cultural division, the separation between the sexes, acts as a paradigm for the two crucial ritual-symbolic practices: the *unification of separated opposites* (for example, in marriage) and the *separation of united opposites* (for example, in circumcision (*ibid.*: 366-67)).

Despite the importance of aspects of bodiliness and bodily movements in both these recent theories, I do not know of the existence of any general study relating aspects of bodiliness to spatial aspects of ritual behaviour. This is one of the reasons why what follows should be considered only an outline.

The human body as a closed 'container' distinguishable from the surrounding environment in its upright position, bilateral symmetry and sensory frontality leads to an 'innate' tendency to spatially discriminate in and out (centre/periphery), up and down (transversal axis), left and right (orientation), and in front of and behind (the latter two taken together constituting direction in a relative or an absolute sense). These basic spatial dimensions of the body coincide with those required to establish the Dogon metaphor of time, the spiralling movement (cf. Griaule and Dieterlen 1965: 164-5).

So, in a first, *static* approach, we can distinguish the following fundamental spatial *oppositions*:

in/out : centre/periphery  
 up/down : transversal axis  
 left/right : orientation  
 front/back : (absolute) direction

A more *dynamic* reading concerns mainly the *transitions* by means of bodily movements between these opposites:

inside/outside : entering/leaving (horizontality)  
 upwards/downward : ascending/descending (verticality)  
 to the left/right : turning counterclockwise/clockwise (circularity)  
 forwards/backwards : approaching/withdrawing (proximity)

These spatial dimensions, separately or in combination, constitute a list of ritually relevant spatial behaviours, directly related to bodily activities and, in the case of

the Dogon, a temporal metaphor. So far, I do not claim the list is of more general relevance; I only claim that it is a useful heuristic device for analysing the ritual behaviour of the Dogon.

The concrete 'ternary logic', which concerns first of all the points of transition, the thresholds, or the *boundaries*, changes with each concrete context. They have a different reference when we talk of the human body, domestic space, or any particular spatial arrangement, but they are conceptualized analogously. For example, when we refer to the body in its *physical* aspect, we are mainly concerned with the bodily surface with its orifices, entries and extensions. Some of these are considered as establishing contact with the outer world (the most obvious example being speech), while others are in the first place receptive of outer stimuli. In other words, we inevitably enter the world of *social* bodiliness, the body in interaction with its surrounding social world. Simultaneously, we enter the area of symbolizations of (aspects of) the body, which cannot be discussed in any general way. There exists a huge literature on various aspects of this topic, but so far as I know it has never been integrated into an encompassing viewpoint on bodiliness. Common to all these aspects of bodiliness is the concern with areas of interaction, of boundary-transgression, that are metaphorically transferred to other cultural domains.

The body is, however, not only a 'closed container' in interaction with the environment. The individual performs actions *with* his body; he uses the space surrounding him, he moves around and gesticulates. These actions can be of various sorts; they include technical actions, social (inter)actions, random actions, and so on, but also ritual actions. This latter, special class of actions seems to display one remarkable characteristic: they are to a high degree stereotyped. This is also true of a lot of purely technical actions: in order to achieve a certain aim, I have to do this and that. But ritual action is different from technical-scientific action in that it does not seem to attain goals; it is *repetitive* action in its purest form, *without any direct purpose*. Contrary to random action, ritual is not only repetitive, it is also to a high degree *non-random*. Almost every action, every movement, appears preconsidered. For example, the spatial dimensions used in ritual action often relate to the basic spatial dimensions outlined above. Ritual action makes use of simple spatial distinctions, and all they can represent metaphorically, to create meaning.

The danger of projection involved in these viewpoints is not to be neglected. If ritual action makes use mainly of spatial distinctions, and if the spatial distinctions I make are really basic, and if these spatial notions really refer to underlying aspects of time, social structure, and world-view, then—and only then—will what I say make some sense. All I can say in defence of this proposal is that it seems at this moment the only model that is able to allow for a fresh outlook on the disparate data at hand concerning the Dogon. It is a generative model; it enables the development, on the basis of a limited set of principles, of an integrated view of the way Dogon conceive of the world and give it meaning.

## 2. *Temporality: Process and Meaning*

In a very general sense, ritual develops 'in' time. Its performance is often concerned with seasonal changes (cyclical rites) and individual life-cycle changes (rites of passage). But also internally, within the ritual performance, temporal aspects occupy a crucial role: ritual actions are repetitive, ritual dances are rhythmic and require synchronization. It is not, however, to these properties that I want to draw attention in the first place, but rather to the more general question of the relationship between processual aspects of ritual and the meaning of ritual action. In other words: how is meaning constructed in the processual development of ritual actions?

Recent anthropological theory shows a growing concern with process (Vincent 1986). A first expression of a processual approach to ritual can, however, already be found in Van Gennep's classic study, *Les Rites de passage* (1969; orig. 1909). Van Gennep considered the meaning of ritual actions to be dependent on the specific position they occupy within the three-phase ritual structure he laid bare. Van Gennep's approach must be considered in the first place as an attempt to supersede a *syntactical* meaning-component; meaning is related to the structure of rites of passage.

Ritual is situated temporally in yet another way. A common feature of a lot of recent theories is their concern with context as a *semantic* selector: the cultural context in general, but especially the internal ritual context establishes specific relationships between ritual symbols, actions etc. These relationships, such as contrast, opposition, before and after, influence their meaning. Bourdieu's theory of ritual, for example, stresses that each interpretation of ritual action has to take into account the global cultural context as well as the place the separate actions occupy within the course of the ritual. According to Bourdieu, the meaning of ritual actions is simultaneously determined by paradigmatic relationships of meaning within the cultural system or subsystems (organized, according to Bourdieu, on the basis of a 'logic of distinction'), and by the paradigmatic relationships between the different elements of the ritual that limit the arbitrariness of their meanings (1980: 18-19).

In Dolgin, Kemnitzer and Schneider's (1977) view on contextual meaning-selection, symbols and meanings are not considered as objects, but primarily as relationships. The relationship between a symbol and its meanings is seldom established by means of pure reference, but rather by means of metasymbolic aspects, such as the context within which they appear. In view of their conception of symbols as being polysemous, the context has to determine which meaning becomes dominant in each concrete appearance of the symbol or symbolic action:

[all meanings of a sign] are equally part of the shared meaning of the sign. What makes one meaning 'primary' is the fact that it is the meaning which is normatively proper for that particular *context*; all other meanings associated with that sign, but in other contexts, become subordinate...the argument we are making, therefore, is that the *structural-processual* description of the cultural system as a whole...is

necessary to and part of understanding any aspect of it, any one act or event. (ibid.: 29)

They thus emphasize the close relationship between structural and processual aspects in the analysis of the meaning of symbolic acts. Structural analyses of meaning are possible, but only the historically situated performance within a culturally defined context will give insight into the particularity of meaning. Since only the concrete context of appearance can determine the meaning of the symbols and actions, symbolic theory has, according to Dolgin *et al.*, to evolve towards a praxis-theory that leaves room for the adjustment and production of meaning in a historically unique performance (ibid.: 36-8).

### 3. *Funerary Ritual Patterning and Meaning*

The basis of anthropological theory concerning the ritual accompaniment of death was laid by two sociologists of the French *Année* school, Arnold Van Gennep and Robert Hertz. In *Les Rites de passage*, Van Gennep presented a general scheme applicable to all rites of passage, including funerals. The general scheme he proposed is ingenious in its simplicity and of wide relevance. It is based on the principle that one conceptual category (e.g. death) creates a binary difference (e.g. alive/dead) that requires a ternary structuring to overcome the opposition (e.g. living/dying/death) (cf. Huntington and Metcalf 1979: 9). So, rituals in which a passage between categories is established will possess a triple structure, viz. separation from the first category, aggregation to the second category, and an intermediary, transitional liminal phase full of ambiguity (see also Turner 1969).

Of more immediate relevance to the meaning of funerary rituals is the study of Hertz (1907) concerning the so-called second funeral. The originality of Hertz's study lies in his coupling of the degeneration of the physical body with the transition of the spiritual principles. The disintegration of the corpse is a precondition of the final aggregation of the 'soul' to the ancestral world. Transition into another world presupposes destruction in this world. The mourning period between first and second burial is intended to make this decomposition of the corpse possible. Hertz distinguishes three factors involved in funerals—mourners, corpse and soul of the deceased. According to which two factors are coupled to each other, he gives three different explanations for identical practices. To illustrate this, I shall discuss briefly the well-known fear of the body of the deceased. Fear of the corpse results from its metaphorical coupling with the soul; as long as the corpse is not decomposed, the soul of the deceased threatens the living. The relationship between body and soul determines the *shape* of the ritual (e.g. double burial). Fear of the corpse is not of a psychological, but of a sociological nature. The deaths of a child and a group leader, for example, are reacted to differently. The attitude of the mourners *vis-à-vis* the corpse is an

expression of the social order and determines the importance and the *impact* of the ritual. The pollution emanating from the dead body is a consequence of the gradual elimination of the deceased as a social individual. This elimination seriously disturbs the relationships between the living, in the sense that they are also in a transitional phase that gives rise to a redefinition of the social relationships (for example, the wife becomes a widow, the oldest son becomes head of the family, and so on). These general aspects (three phases, gradual uncoupling of body and soul) still constitute the basis of anthropological interpretation. In addition, funerary rituals have other marked characteristics: the prominence of the integratory rituals (third phase), their strong processual structuring, and the mutual interdependence between the various factors involved, to which I now turn.

In funerary rituals, the emphasis is unmistakably on the aggregation of the deceased to the ancestral world. This was already noticed by Van Gennep (1969: 209-10). Secondly, the transition of the deceased is not realized through one ritual performance, but through a complex ritual cycle. The strong proliferation of the liminal period (the mourning), gives rise to a long interval between the actual, physical death and the final integration. Although this is true for other rites of passage too, they never seem as marked as in the case of funerary rituals. The difficulty of the transition, and the strong ambiguity *vis-à-vis* the corpse can partly account for this state of affairs. While other rites of passage establish the individual as a whole in a new status, the 'goal' of funerary rituals is precisely the de-structuring of this unity. The individual is split into separate entities that are symbolically irreconcilable and hence require separate ritual handling. On the one hand, the physical body, impure, dangerous, and contagious, has to be discarded; on the other, the spiritual principles, also dangerous but at the same time beneficial, have to be (re)integrated into the 'hereafter'. The gradual separation of body and soul has, in addition, strong repercussions on the position of the close kin, who remain in mourning as long as the transition and the separation is not completed. This already shows how the situation of, and the attitude towards, the three funerary 'protagonists'—the mourners, the body, and the soul—are strongly interdependent. Hertz (1907: 73-4, 82) especially stressed this third property of funerary rituals.

After the fruitful period of theory-formation by members of the *Année* school, there were many substantive contributions to a general theory of funerary ritual. Till late in the 1950s, anthropology was stuck in an atheoretical and cultural relativistic period, from which it escaped only fairly recently with the rising interest—especially in France—in thanatology. Nowadays, we can speak of an 'anthropology of death' (Bloch and Parry 1982; Huntington and Metcalf 1979), which is mainly an attempt to bring about a synthesis of the more sociologically inspired tradition of Hertz and Van Gennep with the symbolical tradition that dominated anthropology in the 1960s and 1970s.

#### 4. Dogon Funerals: Description

The Dogon funerary cycle consists of three important rituals: the funerals proper that concern us here, the Dama—a kind of second burial, and the Sigi—a sexennial rite of regeneration (for the latter, see Verboven 1986).<sup>4</sup>

Immediately after a death, the funerary toilet is begun, including shaving the hair of the dead, temporary residence of the *nyama* (the vital force) and the *kikinu say* (the positive souls), fixing a bandage over the lips, and wrapping the corpse in a shroud. After the toilet, the younger children and the widow are brought to the body.

If the deceased took part in a Sigi ritual, on the first night after his death the Great Mask will be exhibited by the *inne puru* (impure men) against the wall of his house in an adjacent street, while his male and female relatives mourn on the roof of the house. The Great Mask is leaned against the wall and a male member of the family standing on the roof attaches a live chicken to the top of it. After this 'sacrifice', an *inne puru* takes the Great Mask in both arms to dance with it.<sup>5</sup> The Great Mask is brought back to its cavern where the chicken is sacrificed and divided between the *inne puru*.

On the next day at sunrise, the corpse is wrapped in the funerary blanket belonging to the patrilineage (*ginna*), and fixed on a stretcher. Outside, the Tegi Tegi (*action de grâces*) ritual is performed, which consists in a long declamation thanking the deceased for everything he realized during his life and wishing him a safe journey to the other world. On the stretcher, an *inne puru* sacrifices a chicken, given by the son or the father of the deceased, while the men stand in a row facing eastward and the oldest among them recites a long prayer. As soon as the prayer is finished, the men are replaced by the women, who kneel near the stretcher, and offer cowrie shells ('*qui reviendront par la suite aux ine puru*') and cotton ('*qui sera remis au chef du clan voisin*').

Finally, the funerary procession leaves the village in the direction of the burial-place. The stretcher, carried by the *inne puru*, is accompanied by an orchestra and the relatives of the deceased, one of them carrying the calabash containing the hair. When they reach the burial-place, the guard opens the entry to the cavern and enters first, followed by some young male relatives. The funerary blanket is left outside, while the corpse, together with the calabash containing the hair of the deceased, is deposited in the cavern, its feet pointing towards the exit. The funerary shroud is removed and the bandage covering the mouth is cut through. The entry to the cavern is closed, and for six consecutive nights, until the beginning of decomposition, the cavern is guarded.

4. This description is based on the following sources: DeMott 1982; Dieterlen 1941; Griaule 1938; Imperato 1971; Leiris 1933, 1934.

5. The spatial connotations of these dances (vertical mask/horizontal corpse, up/down, before/behind, left/right, centre/periphery) are obvious (see Griaule 1938: 284-6).

From the late afternoon onwards and during the evening of the day of the death, mock battles take place on the terrace of the mortuary house. The male relatives, under the leadership of the eldest among them, go to the mortuary house and assault its roof-terrace, brandishing their lances and shooting in the air. In the course of the evening, groups of men from other families attack in turn the mortuary terrace, imitating war and hunting scenes. Finally, each group conquers the terrace, says thanks to the deceased, and descends to the yard, where they are offered millet beer. Afterwards, each group leaves for the *tay* (the public square). Successive lineages thus perform mock fights with the relatives of the deceased, who stay on the terrace until the next morning.

During these mock battles, the female relatives are present in the streets surrounding the terrace. They make vague dance movements and point their calabashes in the direction of the terrace. Kneeling down, the widow, the mother, and the sisters of the deceased scratch the ground with their calabashes. At a certain moment the sisters of the deceased arrive holding millet stalks, which they beat on the ground four times (left, left, right, right); holding their arms horizontally, they balance laterally. The women 'congratulate' each other, roll themselves in the dust, and throw sand on each others' heads.

As mentioned above, each group of assailants goes to the public square, north of the village, after the mock battles. The first group to arrive there is stopped by an elder, who engages in a hand-to-hand fight with the eldest of the arriving group, but finally has to surrender. New groups arrive, and all the men engage in hand-to-hand fights, some of them simulating getting into trouble or behaving as if dead; but always the elders intervene and separate the fighters with apparent blows with the fist or by knocking their straw hats, while at the same time always congratulating both sets of adversaries.

On the second day around noon, a group of men from lower Ogol, including adolescents and children, leaves the village and goes to the place called *yagama tay*. They are divided into two groups and a battle develops, leading to a general muddle, after which hand-to-hand fights develop. Meanwhile, the women have also reached the place by a different road. They line up to the east of the men, together with the orchestra. Suddenly, a fire flickers up to the south of the fighting scenes; after a short round dance it is extinguished. Men and women return separately, but following an identical route, to the village.

Meanwhile, the archery has started on the *tay*, beginning with the children, followed by the adolescents, and finally the adults. Some marksmen approach the target in a row and threaten it with their bows. They return to the centre of the *tay* where one of them launches an arrow, without bothering much about the target; they are encouraged by the surrounding women, the more so as they mimic and feint. From time to time, the archery is interrupted by salvos of gunfire by mourners from neighbouring villages who also attack the target. In the middle of the *tay*, near the rock or stone *anakade dumma* (*pierre du brave*), the mortuary blanket is exhibited, surrounded by women, relatives and the widow. New arrivals first attack the target and then greet the blanket, brandishing their lances and

exchanging congratulations with the relatives. The widow sits squatting while she receives condolences.

During the afternoon of the second day, five masked dancers, preceded by an orchestra and non-masked dancers, arrive on the *tay* from the east to perform the Baga Bundo.<sup>6</sup> Hastily, the women leave the *tay* and watch the ritual from the surrounding terraces. Four Bede masks encircle a Mulonu (who will later on address the audience), the Sirige mask standing in the centre in front of the funerary blanket, and a sister of the deceased (the future *yasigine*, who initially imitates the movements of the four Bede masks but later sits down at the feet of the Mulonu). After a while, the four Bede masks kneel down at each side of the funerary blanket, beating the ground to the left and the right of the blanket with millet stalks. They change places three times. During the preceding action, the Sirige mask positions itself at some distance from the funerary blanket and bends its long plank towards it, touching the ground with its extremity to the left and the right. Finally, the Mulonu addresses the audience, and the masks return to the cavern of the masks.

After a while, hunters appear on the *tay* from the west. Some of them carry game with them, and they make a tour around the square in a counter-clockwise direction. As soon as they have formed a circle, they turn their faces towards the centre and move on laterally. After some time they form a compact group moving towards a group of menstruating women, who flee away towards the centre of the square, where other women have also gathered. In a group, the hunters encircle the mourning women gathered in the centre around the funerary blanket and return to their starting-point. Next, they climb on a rock one by one and aim their guns at the women, who withdraw to the periphery. The hunters surround the stone, *anakade dumma*, the funerary blanket, the widow and an elder with a drum, who are still present in the centre of the square. The direction of the dance changes regularly, and the dancers squat and stand up again repeatedly. Meanwhile, the elder plays the drum and the widow scrapes with her calabash to the left and the right of the rock to the rhythm of the drumming.

By dawn, a torch, a lance, a powder-horn and the gun of the deceased are drawn up in the middle of the square, and everyone kneels down before them. Again, complex imitations of hunting scenes are performed. Meanwhile, the Na Oyi (*mère donne*) ritual takes place. One of the male uterine relatives of the deceased steals (or at least simulates stealing) the funerary blanket but is caught by the agnatic relatives. In exchange, they receive a goat.

As soon as the funerals have ended, the arrow of the deceased is broken and the pieces deposited in a special cavern where drawings are executed. During the following six days, the funerary blanket is exposed on the yard of the mortuary house to give late arrivals the opportunity to greet and honour the deceased. After that period, it is washed and returned to the head of the patrilineage.

6. For diagrammatic representations, see Griaule 1938 and Verboven 1986.

### 5. *Structural Meaning and Bodily Aspects of the Dogon Funeral*

From this description of the funerary rituals, some structural aspects are immediately apparent.<sup>7</sup> We can distinguish two major 'behaviour complexes', linked to two different spaces inside the village, viz. the actions performed in, or in the neighbourhood of, the mortuary house on the one hand, and the actions performed on the public square on the other. These 'behaviour complexes' are also temporally differentiated: the rituals at the mortuary house are performed (mainly) in the evening and during the night following the death, while the main rites on the *tay* take place during the day following the death after the disposal of the corpse. Also, the general aspects of bodily behaviour are markedly different. These 'behaviour complexes' are thus each other's opposite in most respects, and the transition from one to the other requires the performance of several actions outside the village.

The night following the death, several rituals are performed on the terraces and in the streets adjacent to the mortuary house, in which sorrow and grief seem to be expressed in actions in which several objects, groups and individuals come into relationships of sharpened opposition. The most marked behavioural opposition is that between the aggressive and upright attitude of the men, simulating attacks on the mortuary house, and the passive behaviour of the women, creeping around on the ground or dancing in a semi-prostrate position in the streets below the terraces of the mortuary house.

However, the group of men does not behave as a unit. The male relatives of the deceased, that is, the patrilineage, try again and again to defend the terrace against the attacks of the visiting groups of males, but each time they 'lose' the fight. Afterwards, the visiting men go to the public square where they engage in ritual drinkings and face-to-face fights. On the whole, the behaviour displayed at the mortuary house is aggressive, chaotic, and uncontrolled, and stresses the oppositions between different social groups. At that moment, the corpse of the deceased is still present in the mortuary house and it is 'visited' by the Great Mask (if the deceased was a member of the Awa society). The mask is put against the wall and a live chicken is attached to it. Afterwards, and while the chicken is hanging from the top of the mask, a 'dance' is performed with the Great Mask. This dance is remarkable, the more so since it is the only occasion on which the Great Mask executes a dance, since it is extremely rich in spatial connotations. The liminal capacity of the Great Mask has also been noticed by DeMott (1982: 76):

the Great Mask seems to serve as a vehicle for the spirit of the deceased to aid his passage to the supernatural world...The dance of the Great Mask for the deceased and the sacrificial chicken seem to represent a form of sympathetic magic which

7. For diagrammatic representations, see Griaule 1938 and Verboven 1986.

first attracts and contains the spirit of the deceased in the animal vehicle and then released it into the bush, the domain of the supernaturals, through the sacrifice.

At sunrise on the second day several actions are performed that permit the transition to the second phase of the funerary ritual. The corpse of the deceased is wrapped in the funerary blanket, which is the property of the patrilineage, and carried to the burial-place outside the village. The funerary blanket, containing the beneficial spiritual principles of the deceased, is brought back into the village, more particularly to the public square where it is exposed. Almost simultaneously with the funerary cortège, two groups of young men and women belonging to the village of the deceased, which means that they belong to the same patrilineal clan, leave the village and go separately to the place *yagama tay* situated outside the village. After a rite focused on a fire, they return together to the village square.

It is high noon by now, and on the *tay* the funerary blanket has been exposed, next to which the widow is sitting, surrounded by female (uterine?) relatives. On the square, various ritual actions are performed that seem to possess as a major connotation the unity of the patrilineage (as opposed to the uterine relatives), but also the recognition of the necessary complementarity between men and women (marriage being exogamous at the level of the clan) to assure fertility and offspring. The men behave as a unit; the relatives of the deceased, as well as the other male participants, take part in the same activities, such as the hunting scenes and the archery. In contradistinction to the rituals performed during the evening and, especially, the night before, all actions are very strongly controlled, almost 'stylized', although the actions themselves still refer to potentially mortal activities. If aggression is simulated, it is directed against the menstruating women, representing (temporary) infertility, or the group of uterine relatives, who still have a certain moral right to the offspring of the deceased. The Baga Bundo ritual, in which a male Sirige mask and four female Bede masks participate, seems to express in symbolic action the necessary interdependence between male and female for overcoming individual death by procreation.

## 6. *Towards a Praxis-Based Interpretation*

I do not intend, and in fact I am not able, to interpret the funerary rituals of the Dogon in all their symbolic richness and complexity. A coherent, Western-logical integration of all the relevant components of meaning seems out of the question; or as Bourdieu (1980) would say, cultural meaning is not shaped by a *logique logique* but based on a *logique pratique* full of ambiguities and contradictions. However, I do believe that a 'generative logic' underlies the Dogon worldview and funerary rituals, based on some 'simple' space-time conceptions and their bodily behaviours, as well as their metaphoric extrapolations.

A recurrent property of rituals concerning death and decay is their connection with regenerative phenomena (Bloch and Parry 1982; Zahan 1970: 62). The greater part of the ritual symbolism can only be understood from this perspective of restructuring, reorganizing and regenerating the society confronted with death. Funerary rituals reintegrate the deceased into a new state, at the same time restructuring society itself. The funerals and the *Dama* are respectively the beginning and the ending of a funerary cycle concerned with the consequences of the death of an individual. The *Sigi* occupies a special position; it is also concerned with death, but at a conceptual level (Verboven 1986).

In the first phase of the funeral, the expressions of grief are very marked. The first night following the death, several rituals are performed on the terraces and the streets adjacent to the mortuary house, in which the corpse of the deceased is still present. Successive groups of related men engage in aggressive attacks on the terraces of the mortuary house, which is defended by the male patrilineal relatives of the deceased. They brandish their lances and shoot in the air with their guns. As they have defeated the male relatives of the deceased and conquered the terrace, the groups of males go to the public square, where face-to-face fights develop. The fighters are separated by the *Mulonu*. While the struggles at the mortuary house and on the *tay* continue, the women—and especially the closest female relatives of the deceased—creep around on the ground below the terraces of the mortuary house, making vague dance movements in a semi-prostrate position, and pointing their broken calabashes towards the mortuary house or scratching the ground with them. The behavioural oppositions between men and women are also noticed by DeMott, as is clear from the following quotation:

The male kin of the deceased thus engage in public displays of aggression and destruction which are associated with the masculine concerns of hunting and warfare...(the female kin) dance in a semi-prostrate position in the courtyard below the *ginna* terrace while striking millet stalks and broken calabashes on the ground...the women exhibit more passive and personal expressions of grief that are associated with the cessation of nurturing (the broken calabash) and the feminine concerns of sustenance (the millet stalks) ... the male vertical and dynamic posture may be contrasted with the female horizontal and more passive posture. (1982: 75-6)

The mock battles are regularly interrupted by other actions, such as the visit of the Great Mask, the dance of the sister of the deceased with the millet stalks, a recitation by an *olubaru*, or a ritual focused on a fire. On the whole, the behaviour during the evening and the night following the death is chaotic and aggressive. Several groups come into sharpened opposition with each other. The behaviour of men and women is markedly different, but also the men do not act as one group but confront each other individually and as groups of related men.

The next day, in the morning, the corpse is transported to the burial place. As with the mortuary toilet, the funerary cortège concerns almost only the close relatives of the deceased. The corpse is wrapped in the funerary blanket, which

is the property of the patrilineage and refers to the basic structures of the human world, viz. the social structure and economic activities. After the disposal of the corpse outside the village, the funerary blanket will be exposed on the public square.

While the relatives accompany the deceased to the burial place, two groups of youngsters—one male, the other female—leave the village separately. They meet each other on the place *yagama tay*, and after a short fight and a fire ritual, they return together to the village, more particularly to the *tay*, where meanwhile the archery has begun. According to DeMott, this is an expulsion ritual 'simulating the path of the deceased to the land of the dead' (ibid.: 76).

The actions performed on the public square of the village are completely different from the ones performed during the previous night. The males again act as one coherent group and even the patrilineal relatives of the deceased participate. The actions have not fundamentally changed in nature, but they have changed in quality. Although the actions in themselves still refer to such aggressive, blood-shedding activities as hunting, they are performed in a very controlled, almost stylized, manner, as if to suggest that death and the activities related to it are again under control. The women only participate passively; they surround the funerary blanket. At that moment, five masks enter the square to perform the Baga Bundo ritual and everyone moves to the periphery of the *tay*. This ritual sequence was interpreted by DeMott as a rite that is symbolically *parallel* to the rituals performed at the mortuary house the night before:

The *Baga bundo* seems to symbolically parallel the male and female roles of the mourners at the funeral. The four *bede* masks seem to assume a feminine role since they kneel, strike millet to the ground, and take a more passive part in the rite...The *sirige* seems to assume the masculine role, since the vertical superstructure of the mask suggests the dynamic, vertical posture of the male participants, and the up-and-down movements of the *sirige* performer mirror the ascent and descent of the male combatants during the mock battles at the *Ginna* house. Therefore, the *Baga bundo* appears to represent a symbolic enactment of the archetypal male and female roles at the funerary rites. (ibid.: 77)

This seems improbable to me, since my analysis is based precisely on the opposition between both 'behaviour complexes'. While the rituals at the mortuary house seem to express the disintegration of the social group as a consequence of the death of one of its members, the main connotation of the Baga Bundo appears to be a symbolic restructuring of the human world. In other words, I consider it as a reintegrative ritual sequence, in which the basic structure of the universe is expressed. The male Sirige mask stands in the centre of the scene, as a kind of *axis mundi* and faces the funerary blanket, temporarily containing the beneficial spiritual principles of the deceased. Symbolically, the mask refers to the patrilineal ancestors. The four female Bede masks circle around the Sirige until they kneel down at the four sides of the funerary blanket, beating the ground three times to the left and three times to the right of the blanket. During this action, the Sirige

dancer bends his long plank mask towards the funerary blanket and touches the ground to the left and to the right. In this action, all basic spatial (and temporal), social and economic distinctions of Dogon society are symbolically present and reactualized after their disturbance by the death of a member of the community. After the masks have left the square, the hunters appear on the *tay* and, as one group, surround the menstruating women, representing infertility, and chase them to the periphery of the *tay*. Implicitly, the complementarity of men and women for establishing offspring is recognized, but marriage being exogamous the uterine relatives have to be compensated a last time for their loss. The normal human order having been re-established, the closest relatives of the deceased enter the mourning period until the performance of the Dama.

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## MYTH AS CULTURAL PRAXIS

RIK PINXTEN

### *Introduction*

THE general idea of this essay is to elaborate as far as possible one uncommon intuition about myth: a myth is not a text but a complex of action. To phrase this intuition in a more systematic way, I make use of the general theory of action of Kotarbinski and of the theoretical frame of Bourdieu. The essay is a theoretical statement or mental exercise, not an empirical study.

### 1. *Praxiology*

Kotarbinski and his collaborators developed the general theory of action known as praxiology (Kotarbinski 1965). The conceptual frame of this theory offers to the social scientist an auxiliary method for object identification, starting from a particular philosophical perspective. It is obvious that all research starts from a preconception of what is to be studied, expressed in the terms and concepts of the hypotheses and questions of the researcher. It is important for understanding the argument of the present essay to dwell a bit on this 'vague' or 'deep' level.

This essay is in part a translated version of an earlier article published in Dutch as 'Mythe als praxis' (Pinxten 1989). Some parts are new, others totally altered. I am grateful to L. Apostel and D. Verboven for comments and inspiring discussion.

For centuries we conceived of our world of experience primarily or preferentially as a world of appearances (Goodman 1952) or even of 'images'. Aspects of form, structural invariants and other predominantly perceptual (or even only visual) properties of phenomena were seen to be uniquely relevant for acquiring knowledge about these phenomena. In the present century, two major and mutually exclusive theories of knowledge contest the arena in the social sciences, only diverging for their object construction, it appears, at a more superficial level. On the one hand, the subjectivists (phenomenologists, humanistic social scientists etc.) perceive the social object as very much like the subject of the researcher and reach knowledge about it by means of the method of empathy (*einfühlen*). The objectivists, (behaviourists, structuralists etc.), on the other hand, conceive of the object as maximally foreign (or external) to the subject of the researcher. At the limit, the latter will approach 'the other' with the same attitude(s) he would develop for the study of a stone or a table. In both cases, however, the object to be studied has the characteristics of a solid: it has the thingness feature first and foremost. The researcher acquires knowledge about the object either by 'becoming like it' or by measuring or registering it 'from the outside'. In contrast, the praxiological approach aims to alter profoundly the construction of the object of study: the basic stuff of social realities is practice. It consists of events, actions, interactions and the products or results of action. Social reality is seen as fundamentally dynamic, and the static aspects that were at the heart of the classical approach are taken to be but parts of that reality; they should not be taken for the whole. In this essay I indicate in what way myth can be conceived of as a particular form of praxis. The aim of this perspective is to allow for native views on myth: hence, all existing frames (with their roots in Western theological concepts and distinctions like immanent/transcendent, sacred/profane and the like) will be treated with the utmost reserve.

### 1.1 The praxiological concepts of Kotarbinski

For the time being, praxiology is composed of two rather distinct, but equally relevant theories. The philosophical and functional work of Kotarbinski (e.g. 1965) is to be complemented by the sociological theory of Bourdieu (e.g. 1971, 1980a). The latter does not refer to the former's Polish school, but his concepts can easily be understood as an extension and broadening of it. I will limit my presentation to these two 'schools'. Their relationships with former or present behaviourist (Barker, Wright, Harris) or functionalist (Turner) authors is not discussed here (see especially, Verboven 1986).

Kotarbinski's main concepts are the following:

(a) Event. The world consists of events, organized in natural regularities or patterns.

- (b) Agent. The agent of an event is the person who causes an event by means of his free impulse. (The notion of 'free impulse' enables us to distinguish between action or praxis and physical or biological events.)
- (c) Actor. An actor is the agent who assumes a role, i.e. one who deliberately acts out the impulse of an(other) agent. (This is my addition to Kotarbinski's frame.)
- (d) Action. An action is the event caused by an agent's impulse.
- (e) Result. The result of an event is independent of the intensity of an impulse. The result of an event is always another event. The result can be kinetic (and hence constitute a change) or static (and hence be a state).
- (f) Goal. A particular event is the goal of an agent if the latter makes efforts such as to produce that particular event (Kotarbinski 1965: 28).
- (g) Product. The product of an agent is the particular object of which the state (of continuation) or the change is the result of the free impulse of the agent. Since products are objects they are made out of a particular material or substrate that the agent has to take into account in the course of his action.
- (h) Instrument. The agent can use or produce one or more instruments in action. That is to say, he can employ objects by means of which a force, an influence, an action, a material part etc., can be transferred from object A to object B. The transfer or transmission can be equivalent, strengthening or weakening.
- (i) Enclosure. Apart from instruments, a second specific type of object is produced: such objects are called 'enclosures'. The agent produces a space wherein actions take place.
- (j) Means. Given a particular goal, and given an instrument or an enclosure, the means of an action is that change in instrument or enclosure that results in the goal of the agent.

The very general frame of simple actions is made sophisticated in order to describe composite actions of multiple agents with multiple instruments, goals or results.

My next step is to complement this frame with some notions from Bourdieu's social-action theory. This will complete the analytic frame, which will then be used to characterize mythical praxis.

## 1.2 The praxiological concepts of Bourdieu

Bourdieu's theoretical programme is complex. One of the moves he advocates is to complement theoretical knowledge (as it is recognized in the structuralist outlook) with practical knowledge. In the social sciences, this brings him to complement the analysis of culture as a deep-structural notion with the praxiological characterization of actions, products of actions, habits etc. (Bourdieu 1980a: Chs 1 and 2). In the second place, Bourdieu describes social phenomena with reference to the body as a basic frame for organizing one's experience. Thus it can be said that 'the elementary structures of corporeal experience coincide with the principles that structure objective space' (1971: 192, my translation).

Bourdieu's general aim is to develop a general theory of culture, including power, symbolic features, social life, taste and art, and so on. In that perspective, the mere perception of isomorphisms (between bodily aspects and sociocultural features) does not suffice. He develops a set of categories that encompass the socio-cultural domain. The categories draw on his synthesis of insights from Durkheim (e.g. the notion of social integration), Lévi-Strauss (e.g. communication), Marx (e.g. power, dominance), Freud (e.g. negation, censure) and Weber (e.g., legitimation, materialism, field theory) (see Bourdieu 1971, 1972 and 1980a).

The main categories of interest for our purpose, are as follows:

(a) Field. A field is the set of positions, intrinsically defined, i.e. independent of the characteristics of the agents. The field specifies interest, agents, the monopoly of legitimate violence and the sharing of interests. In essence, a field specifies the power relationship between human agents (Bourdieu 1980b).

(b) Habitus. A habitus is a collective phenomenon that can be understood as the common code for actions performed by a particular set of agents. It stands both for the interiorization of goals realized and for the set of particular recipes, goals and teleological objects. Any habitus is dialectically positioned between praxis that has been manifested on the one hand and intentions towards manifestation on the other. Actual praxis is the product of the dialectic relationship between an 'adequate' habitus and a field (Bourdieu 1980a: 87-111).

(c) Practical beliefs. This notion refers to the implicit knowledge about the capabilities of the body in a particular field. The bulk of gender-related metaphors of a culture can be seen to be particular forms of practical beliefs. (ibid.: 4).

(d) Symbolic capital. This term refers to the set of social and cultural ties, values and all (other) forms of 'credit' that a group can bestow on the agent who has been experienced as offering, or who is expected to offer, the best material and symbolic guarantees for the persistence of the group. Myths play an important role in the increase or decrease of symbolic capital in a community (ibid.: 7).

In my opinion, this set of four categories can be conceived of as the praxis-correlate of what is often referred to as 'world-view' or 'ideology' in the more classical and static analyses: practical beliefs structure action at the output level; the habitus would then be comparable to long-term memory; the symbolic capital corresponds to the socially explicit system of beliefs and values that 'guide' behaviour; and the field correlates with the notion of 'contexts' in such an approach.

## 2. Praxiological Analyses of Myth

### 2.1 A preliminary statement

My basic intuition is that a myth should be characterized as an instance of praxis and not merely as a text. The latter view is probably a by-product of the fixation of myths in a written form in our tradition, to be kept in a book as a revealed and hence unalterable message. Over many centuries of theological dominance we have come to look upon myth as primarily or even exclusively text.

However, it is beyond any doubt that myth as written text is the exception: of the several thousand cultures we know of, only a few have a written language. Of the latter group, again only a few used writing skills to fixate myths: for example, neither the people who compiled the Tibetan Book of the Dead (a handbook for divination practices) nor those who compiled the Maya codices (a set of calendars for ritual practice (Vollemaere 1983)) wrote down their myths; and while the Vai developed their own written language, they never used it in ceremonial or religious matters. Of the literate cultures, only those of the Indo-European area have written down their mythical sources: the Vedas in India (though they are not used as 'holy texts'), the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* in the powers of Asia Minor and Classical Greece, the Old Testament in Judaea, the Gospels in the Christendom of the first centuries AD, and the Koran in the Islamic states. There is no doubt that these are exceptions in the frame of universal history, and moreover they seem to correlate most often with important political changes: in the case of Judaism, the Pentateuch was written down after the Kingdoms, and can well be understood as an attempt to regain control over a dissipating group of tribes; the Gospels served the purpose of marshalling the believers according to the rule of the growing church of Peter; and the Koran was from the beginning meant both as a religious and as a political instrument. Although more research is necessary to substantiate this point, it seems at least probable that fixation as text went hand-in-hand with institutional and political interests.

In contrast to these traditions, a look at myth in non-literate cultures shows great care for interpretation and variation. For example, the origin myth of the Navajo is known in a series of versions (six of which were recorded, of which three were published, see Wyman 1975). The multitude of versions is no problem to the Navajo; they do not search for an Ur-myth or mother-version (as Lévi-Strauss (1958) is so anxious to do), but instead urge the anthropologist to visit several good singers in order to enjoy the particular style and emphasis of each. In the field, it was not uncommon for me to be offered a variety of interpretations on a particular theme or to be invited to a variety of performances of the same theme: the stress of elder people would then be on the beauty of this or that version. Similar attitudes have been witnessed in other traditions, for example, the Dogon with their variety of mythological themes stand out in this regard (Verboven 1982).

## 2.2. A praxiological approach to myth

To reach an adequate representation of myth as praxis I will use all the praxiological features of the analytic frames outlined above. The presentation below aims to characterize myth on a general or abstract level; it does not deal with themes, agents, and so on within myths.

Myth as praxis is a form of communication. However, a myth is not only a vehicle of communication (the text or 'discourse' as the structuralist would say; see Maranda 1972: 13), but an englobing verbal action of a group or people. In order to make this point clearly, let us look at the critique developed by Hymes. Hymes (1981) attaches great importance to the practice of recording and representing myths as texts. That is to say, all 'nonsensical' utterances, all noises-on-the-side, all differences in loudness or tone, all movements of the teller, all aspects of clothing and performances, peculiarities in teller and audience and so on, are omitted from the report. What results is something that resembles strongly a Western poem or a Western epic text (such as you can find in the Greek epics or in the Bible). This text can then be analysed by means of simple structuralist procedures. Hymes calls this the work of 'editing censors' (*ibid.*: 7) who cut to size and structure a rich cultural phenomenon to make it fit with their own cultural criteria of intelligibility and manageability. When we do not adopt this truncating procedure and include all sorts of both verbal and circumstantial material in the description of a myth, we have to deal with a cultural complex that looks more like a composite speech act than a text. A myth can be described as an action in the verbal medium that combines several if not all types of speech acts: information is given, assertions are uttered or questioned, emotions of distress, joy, camaraderie etc. are induced in teller and audience alike, and so on. The tale is also or may be primarily an instrument or means; it is not the only aspect of the myth that matters.

The mythical agent is, again, not a single person. The story-teller is clearly an actor. Different cultures are reputed to have specialist story-tellers (the griots in Africa are well known; see, for example, Chinweizu 1988). In other cultures, story-telling is the privilege of a variety of people: for example, the Navajo medicine man knows several myths (used in ceremonies), and the Navajo thinker-speaker provides myth and comments (Pinxten 1982). In written cultures, myths seem to be related (and eventually interpreted) first and foremost by an actor who is a legitimate representative of the church or institution. Indeed, the priest, rabbi and mullah are respected as the sole interpreters of myths in these religions; actions from other members of the community are liable to be considered illegitimate, that is, heretical.

Apart from the specialist, passive agents (the audience of the myth) can be distinguished. In my understanding, a third type of agent is present in the mythical performance: one or more mythical agents who appear in the mythical story and (can) play a role in the interactions between human agents and the powers outside (natural forces, gods, ghosts or what have you). The mythical agent is referred to

in the myth and serves as a character in it; however, by the mere performance of the myth this agent's relationship to the present community is activated (e.g. Christ in the Gospels, Allah in the Koran, but also Changing Woman in the Navajo Blessingway, or Amma in the Dogon mythology).

In some cases, the mythical agent performs exemplary behaviour: his actions 'show the way' to people of today. In these cases, the myth can be conceived, amongst other things, as an explicative speech act, as in the myth of Asdiwal (Lévi-Strauss 1973). It is in those cases then, that a myth can have a foundational meaning and function, as is stressed rather too generally by the phenomenologists of religion (e.g. Eliade 1965).

In the treatises on myth, opinions on the mythical result diverge. (I reiterate that the result is the action that is caused by an agent.) Eliade claims (*ibid.*) that myths realize or trigger off a (new) relationship between the agent (actor and/or audience) and the 'holy' or religious phenomenon. The authors of the Manchester school of anthropology state that myths cause the solution of (social) problems and hence are functional for a community (e.g. Gluckman 1966; see also Lemaire 1976). In contrast to this view, Lévi-Strauss (1973) claims that myths confront the audience with the insolubility of a problem and hence cause resignation and acceptance of one's lot.

The mythical goal is defined in a vague way by most authors. In a general way, a myth is said to help the believer reach a religious experience of *Ganzheit* (or 'unity') (Eliade 1965; Van der Leeuw 1977). In the Dogon tradition it induces the people to integrate in the cultivated area and to shy away from the chaotic world of the forest (Griaule and Dieterlen 1965). I cannot but suspect that these authors are heavily influenced by the Christian tradition (a documented fact for several of them). What is a religious experience in a non-Mediterranean tradition? Is not the particular distinction between immanent and transcendent realities implied here?

The notion of instrument can be understood in two ways. The Christian authors (such as Van der Leeuw and Eliade) claim that myths are instrumental for the subject in making contact with the transcendental reality. Rituals may be said to have the same function (see, for example, on Navajo ritual, Reichard 1939). In some cases, myth and ritual can work as instruments for one another. On a second level and internal to a particular myth, the use of specific metaphors and symbols and the staging of different mythical agents can act as so many instruments for the believer or performer: a particular symbol will lead on to a particular action, which will induce a specific formula and so on.

The mythical product cannot be identified. Some authors will point to the text of a myth (e.g. Maranda 1972) or to the abstraction of the myth as sign (e.g. Lévi-Strauss 1958). In my view, these are by-products. However, the actual reaching of the religious target (God, Nature etc.) cannot be identified in a straightforward way. This is an essential characteristic of the mythical complex (and of religious behaviour in general): the appearance of monsters, hybrids and so on within particular myths is perfectly feasible or 'possible' in the context of the mythical

world, but not in everyday life. In this sense, I say there are no (everyday life) products to a myth.

The mythical means is best known in the form of symbols. In an objectified way, these symbols can be found in religious objects (e.g. the cross in Christianity) or signs and designs (e.g. the drypaintings of the Navajo; see Wyman 1983). On the other hand, the (holy) words and texts of several traditions fulfil a similar role.

Mythical enclosures are not always of a material kind. Whereas a spatio-temporal context for ritual is unambiguously defined in a material referent (a temple, a celebration space, the village area etc.), the mythical event seems to be differently confined by any particular material setting. For example, the Gospels can be recited at any place and time but should be read during Holy Mass. In a different way, Navajo myths cannot be performed during summer, but in winter any place will do. In an abstract sense, the myth itself can realize an 'immaterial' enclosure (Van der Leeuw 1977): the contents of a myth can define a universe wherein both the human beings and the mythical agents hold a place.

The mythical field is identical to the global religious field. Within it, any particular myth can define a subfield. Myths can commemorate, alter or continue the power relationships that are the substance of the field. In the Navajo tradition, this must be taken literally: any performance of a myth has direct impact on reality, that is, on the power field of human beings and other creatures (Witherspoon 1977). In the Christian tradition, the relationship seems to be indirect: the transcendental God has defined the features of the field and the believer can only interact according to the pre-established rules.

Particular mythical practical convictions should be found in a specific way of address or speech, a particular attitude of reverence, and so on. Exclusively mythical convictions might be isolated.

The mythical habitus is an important notion that can help the grasping of the religious dimension, and with it the notion of mythical praxis. In his influential functionalist analysis Malinowski (1948) in fact reduces mythical praxis to habitus. His notion of 'charter' is very close to Bourdieu's concept. A myth is a charter that holds the convictions, the moral and behavioural principles of the agent and which guards the procedures of rituals. The overlap between Malinowski's and Bourdieu's notions is striking, I think. However, the concept of charter has to be amended: often a myth shows exemplary behaviour, rules of excellence and so forth, but as often it seems to warn of things to be avoided or prohibited. I would say that myth thus seems to function as a reservoir of beliefs, procedures and so on (and perhaps of an integrated world-view in some traditions), but this does not mean that myth has primacy over or is the foundation of, in any sense, other aspects of culture. This connotation of 'charter' has to be dropped.

Symbolic capital is relevant for the phenomenon of myth in various ways. On the one hand, mere knowledge of one's mythology may add credit: our informant Curly Mustache was knowledgeable and hence highly respected in this sense (Pinxten, Van Dooren and Harvey 1983), and the same goes for Ogotemmel in the Dogon tradition (Griaule 1960). The very authoritative figure of Storm in the

Sioux tradition is another case in point (Storm 1972). The status of theologians and prophets may (each in their own way) be mentioned as correlates in Western history. On the other hand, symbolic capital can be lost and, moreover, the accumulation of it may trigger losses of status, or disruption. This is at least my understanding of witchcraft, that old favourite of anthropologists.

In the case of the Navajos, the possession of knowledge in a great amount put the possessor in a double position: he gained respect because of it, but at the same time he grew more and more liable of becoming a witch; that is to say, he could use the precious things he knew against the people. In Western traditions, the strange history of heresy points in a similar direction: to be respected for your knowledge implies running the risk of confronting the power of the institution.

Praxiology is a metatheory and my aim has been to show how it could be used to approach the vast and variegated field of mythical phenomena. It is my conviction that we need a common ground (other than or beyond theological notions) to try and study religious phenomena. Praxiological notions may offer just that. The major work, namely the empirical filling in and testing of this framework remains to be done. Theoretical comparison of this frame with others (for example, the phenomenological outlook) is another major task. Already, however, in this very succinct form of presentation, the frame may, I hope, yield some response from scholars.

### 3. *Summary*

A myth can now be circumscribed as an instance of praxis with the following praxiological features:

- (a) Action. A composite speech act, collective.
- (b) Agent. Different types of agents (active, passive, virtual).
- (c) Result. The relationships with the Ur-phenomenon are (re)actualized.
- (d) Goal. To participate with the Ur-phenomenon.
- (e) Instrument. To reach symbolic capital; eventually for ritual, and vice versa.
- (f) Product. None, only by-products.
- (g) Means. Mainly symbols, texts.
- (h) Enclosure. Can be material or ideal.
- (i) Field. Coincides with religious field.
- (j) Practical convictions. Some particular forms.
- (k) Habitus. The charter-concept (minus some features).
- (l) Symbolic capital. Myth can add or lose credit.

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## **RAPPING: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC STUDY OF ORAL TRADITION IN BLACK URBAN COMMUNITIES IN THE UNITED STATES**

**PIETER REMES**

### **1. *Introduction***

'RAPPING' is part of the cultural heritage of Black ghetto life. According to Black semantics it not only denotes ordinary conversation but also defines specific ways of communication. In the 1960s, many linguists, sociologists and psychologists conducted thorough research on the behaviour and language-use of 'ghetto Blacks'. The old, pathological interpretations of Black behaviour were discarded. A Black culture concept was acknowledged. The Civil Rights movement changed the in-

This essay draws on research carried out during 1987 and 1988 for a 'licence' thesis and degree in African History and Linguistics at the University of Ghent, Belgium. In September 1986 and September 1987, I stayed in the Lower East Side of New York City, collecting material, talking to people and learning about the social and cultural context of rap performances. Most of the data was gathered through the transcription of recorded rap performances (totalling some 150 pages of transcription), which I then analysed using Dell Hymes's model (see Hymes 1972) as a starting-point. I also recorded several radio broadcasts in New York City that specialized in rap (notably DJ Red Alert's Saturday night show). In Belgium, I have benefited from the assistance of Pierre Dockx, a DJ and passionate record collector, who let me use his extensive collection and guided me through the stacks of 12" singles and albums that fill his apartment. Along with this intensive immersion in old and new rap performances, I have drawn on a variety of literature dealing with African and African-American folklore and music genres, trying to trace verbal and musical patterns that preceded the rapping of the 1970s and 1980s.

dividual and collective identity of Black Americans. In sociolinguistic studies of that period, rapping was described as fluent, lively speech, highly determined by personal style. It is especially linked with the streets, an important concept in the life of Black youth: 'the streets *is* any place 'cept home, church or school' (Folb 1980: 76). It is a special domain where young people act and move about without direct control by adults or the authorities. For many youths the streets is (often literally)<sup>1</sup> their home. The streets is a place where the largest parts of their lives are lived, where friends and enemies are made, where they prove themselves in personal interaction and where they learn the abilities and techniques to face life. Life in the streets provides a hard, practical education. One's image is determined by one's street behaviour.

## 2. *Origins*

Since the mid-1970s, 'rapping' has been associated with the hip-hop movement, which originated in the South Bronx, New York. Those rap performances can be defined as rhyming in a specific rhythm, in between speech and song, or as 'rapid-fire street talk, generally rhymed, spoken to minimal musical accompaniment of a percussive ostinato, punctuated by an occasional guitar or bass chord' (Shaw 1986: 384). DJs (disc jockeys) control the record-players and mixers; MCs (masters of ceremony) compose lyrics, picking up inspiration from ghetto life. Now, rap has spread across America. In the ghettos of Los Angeles, Chicago, Washington, New York and so on, young people are busy creating new rhymes and rhythms.

In the late 1960s, the Civil Rights movement lost such popular and charismatic leaders as Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. The movement for equal rights was overshadowed by violent race riots across the country. Among the people in the ghettos there was discontent, rage and despair. In this political vacuum street gangs began to flourish, as is described in this rap of the Mystery Crew:

in the late sixties the gangs came out  
 people runnin' in the crib, they were scared to come out  
 yeah, the rebel gangs that controlled the streets  
 you either did what you're told or you were dead meat!

Initially, the goal of these gangs was the defence of territory against rival gangs. Afrika Bambaataa, one of the central figures in the development of the rap

1. Streetwork, an organization in New York City, tries to improve the condition of homeless youth, gives advice and offers washing facilities; in 1987 it came in contact with 5500 homeless youths.

movement, was at that time a member of the powerful Black Spades, the largest Black gang in New York. In the period between 1968 and 1973 the violence culminated. Internal destruction, pressure from the city authorities, drugs, and the reaction of Black women to male violence eventually led to the downfall of gangs—although later on new and more violent gangs erupted as a result of the growing drugs trade. Gang leaders tried to produce alternatives for the Black ghetto youth. Slowly, the hierarchical gang structures mutated into more peaceful groups. Bambaataa started the Zulu Nation, initially The Organisation. Activities shifted from street violence to street music and dance. Thus, hip-hop started as a collective and positive reaction against the spiral of violence of the street gangs.

The ghettos were and are neglected by the government; the future prospects of a Black boy or girl are severely hampered by the surrounding ghetto. Poor education and housing, social instability, high unemployment, drug and alcohol addiction, high crime-rates, along with the second-rank position of Blacks and growing racism, put a heavy load on the development of ghetto youth. People like Bambaataa brought rival gangs together in organizing dance competitions. These were held in schools, neighbourhood centres and parks. In the beginning (1972 to 1974-5) rapping was marginal. This does not mean that it had a small audience, but that it was not a mainstream movement. Rappers performed almost exclusively in parks, on the streets or at parties in the ghetto. DJs recorded their mixes on cassettes and played these on loud ghetto-blasters in the streets, while the rappers performed live, bringing their own compositions.

Rappers create a new role model; they show young people the instruments for making their own future in a positive manner. They offer self-respect and revive Black consciousness and Black pride. It is no longer the negative image of the Black hustler that attracts the youth. Because rappers, such as Bambaataa, Ice-T and Just Ice, were formerly gang members, they possess street credibility and know the problems young Blacks are facing. The adolescents can identify themselves with the rappers when they rap about the dangers of crack (a form of heroin), because they are their equals. The channel through which the message is given is a part of their world. Rapping is a means of communication that young people learn in the streets. Daily they are confronted with new compositions. It is a collective movement of dancers, DJs, MCs and graffiti artists, wherein a talented individual can develop his or her skill. It is not a privileged occupation, since the basic ingredients are readily available: the human voice, record-players, old records, a mixer and an audience. Anybody can become a star in the rap firmament:

the things I do, make me a star  
 an' you can be too, if you know who you are  
 just put your mind to it, you go real far  
 like the pedal to the metal when you're drivin' a car

Even without record-players, young Blacks produce rhythms. Some people use their vocal organs as an instrument to imitate the sounds of drums and bass

normally produced by an electronic rhythm-box. The implosive and explosive sounds of the 'human beat box' are called clicks. Unfortunately, the written word is unsuitable for describing this phenomenon—one has to hear and see it.

The first MCs supported their DJs; they stimulated the dancing audience with their rhyming verses and introduced the DJs. The MC made the link between the audience and the DJ with rhymes like these:

throw your hands in the air  
 an' wave 'em like you just don't care  
 young lady in the white, she'll bite all night  
 young lady in the yellow got a faggot for a fellow...

Rap crews started to develop; MCs took turns at the microphone and competed for the favours of the audience. There is a lot of boasting and bragging, like Big Daddy Kane in his rap, 'R.A.W.':

here I am, R.A.W.  
 a terrorist, here to break trouble to—  
 —phony MCs, I move on the seas  
 I just conquer an' stop another rapper with ease  
 second to none, makin' MCs run  
 so don't try to step to me coz' I ain't the one  
 I delete rappers just like Tylenol  
 an' they know it ...  
 I bust a rhyme with authority, superiority  
 an' captivate the whole crowd's majority  
 the rhymes are used, definitely amused  
 better than *Dynasty* or *Hill Street Blues*  
 I'm short to score an' go for more  
 without a flaw coz' I get raw ...

Rappers make fun of others, even insult them. They boast about their sexual capacities, invent stories. Serious themes like racism, violence and drugs are also incorporated. Rappers draw inspiration from their own lives and give advice about ghetto life to younger generations.

### 3. *Communal Recreation*

Blues is a musical style in which musicians and singers have used and still use a common heritage. It grew out of the same tradition as spirituals and work songs. Time produced a distinct, musical and textual blues corpus on which everyone was free to draw. A blues song is communal property, so to say. Lyrics are used and

re-used, slightly transformed to produce a personal rendition in the actual performance. Structures were preserved, content changed.

The music that DJs produce shows proof of communal recreation, although in a highly novel way. I have already mentioned that they use record-players, records and mixing panels. DJs do not manipulate these technical devices in a traditional way. At normal parties, a DJ sees to it that the crossover from one record to another goes smoothly, combining the two in a short mix. The musical accompaniment of rap requires technical expertise, an extensive record collection and ingenuity. First, a DJ searches for interesting instrumental and/or vocal fragments. Then, with two record-players, a mixing panel and two copies of the same record, he proceeds as follows: he plays the fragment on record 1, then switches with the mixing panel to record 2, where the same fragment starts; when record 2 is playing, he turns record 1 back to the beginning of the fragment; by constantly switching from record 1 to record 2 he repeats the same fragment in a loop, thus producing new music. This is a simple example to explain the basic form of rap music, which initially was called 'break-beats'. Beats are broken up and then put together again. With more record-players (three, four or more), the DJ can build up the accompaniment with more fragments. To incorporate these fragments, several techniques have been developed: (a) *punch-phasing* consists of the repetition of a small fragment, like a drumbeat, guitar chord, shout etc.; (b) *scratching* is self-explanatory; the DJ quickly turns the record back and forth with his fingers, while the needle is still in the grooves, thus producing scratching sounds; (c) with *cutting*, he omits the back and forth movement of scratching and lets the record continue normally; (d) *spinback* is playing a fragment backwards. The record is put on top of a small box or bowl, on the record-player, and the needle is turned upside down. The same backwards playing can be achieved by enlarging the hole in the record, then inserting a piece of cardboard; finally, the DJ manually turns the record backwards (which requires dexterity, precision and speed control); (e) by manipulating the volume-button, a DJ can create a stuttering sound, a technique which is called *transform*.

In the beginning, all these techniques were executed manually. DJs were masters of their craft, as their names convey: Grandwizard Theodore, Grandmixer DST, Cut Creator and so on. With the advent of music computers the produced sounds can be digitally stored on a sampler. Yet the real expertise is found amongst those DJs who continue to operate manually; they own record archives, have excellent memories and can identify visually musical fragments on a record. They use strange, obscure, unknown as well as known records of any type; the list of records is the secret of their success (record labels are removed, records renamed). Grandmaster Flash sums it all up: 'What I would do, is pick the most climactic part or the strongest part, the funkier part of the record, an' just continuously repeat that part over an' over again...it took me hours to figure out the best part of the record, I'd master it, I'd make a program out of, like, 30 or 40 records an' I'm ready to go out there an' kill 'em.'

Ideally, one should listen to the music with a music and rap connoisseur; only then is one able to recognize the different fragments and to relate them to the original versions. Fragments may comprise no longer than one or two seconds. The DJ has to see to it that the musical pieces fit the basic rhythm, in accordance with the number of 'beats per minute' (BPM). David Toop (1984: 36) gives a sharp description of the effect of this music: 'Like watching transformation effects in modern horror movies like *The Thing* or *The Howling*, the endless high-speed collaging of musical fragments leaves you breathless, searching for reference points. The beauty of dismembering hits lies in displacing familiarity.'

Hip-hop DJs combine all musical genres to create a new, distinct musical style, whereby old, forgotten, popular, obscure and new records are put to a new use.

#### 4. *Call-and-Response Patterns*

Rap performances are often a display of complex structures of communication. The principle of call-and-response has been used to describe church services, where the audience responds to the preacher: speakers are hearers, and vice versa. A response is a new call, which causes a new response, etc. In rap performances I distinguish two variants of this principle. I call the first type *internal call-and-response*, as it is situated within one performance. The simplest pattern consists of one rapper, performing a cappella before an audience. The rhymes he or she recites before the audience cause such reactions as shouting, laughing, whistling, handclapping etc. The crowd gives an evaluation of the rapper's performance. The rapper can incorporate the crowd into his rap by rapping to them directly, as in the popular shout: 'Put your hands in the air an' wave 'em like you just don't care', or 'Young ladies in the house say ou-ouw!' This pattern can easily be expanded with musical or vocal interludes by a DJ or human beat box. The rapper puts the musical contribution of the DJ in the foreground of the performance by stimulating him or letting him show his talents: 'Grandmaster, cut faster!' or 'And to expand my musical plan / Cut Creator, rock the beat with your hand!' The DJ then displays his expertise and offers a musical extravaganza.

The pattern gets more complex when more rappers participate in one performance. (The audience is still present as an evaluative, third (or fourth, fifth etc.) participant.) I begin with a simple pattern involving two rappers (A and B), who take turns at reciting, and a DJ (Mix Master T) who cuts the records:

- A. I'm the D.O.N. of the microphone  
 the A.L.D. that's always known  
 got the dangerous D that's just a case  
 most definitely I put other rappers in their place  
 an' for all you knuckleheads who cannot spell  
 I'm Donald D an' I rock well

- B. on the microphone, never left alone  
 got more juice than Al Capone  
 I am the brother B in the place  
 guaranteed to put a smile on your face  
 but I'm here tonight to let you know  
 my zodiac's sign's L.E.O.  
 so one for the treble, two for the bass  
 come on, Master T, let's rock this place

Rappers can also alternate much faster, rhyme after rhyme, in a rapid succession of A/B/A/B/...:

- A. don't burst out in a sweat  
 we haven't even started yet
- B. you talk about a phantasy  
 an' how a real man should be

The pattern gets more complex when rapper B intervenes within the recitation of A. By doing this, he strengthens the verse-rhythm and puts more stress on one specific word. The formula of the pattern is A-(B)-A-(B)/A-(B)-A-(B)/... (the words in italics are recited by rapper B):

- A. I got a friend named *Dale!*, he's cool as *hell!*  
 got a face like a *booger!*, a nose like a *snail!*  
 my friend named *Dale!* is locked in a *cell!*  
 coz' he's always gettin' *pooped!*, now his name is *Gale!*

The intensification of the rhyme can also be produced by both rappers, as in the following example, where two rappers again take turns at reciting. The pattern is A-(A&B)-A-(A&B)-.../B-(A&B)-B-(A&B)-...:

- A. I had this girl named *Avy* guess what she *gave me*  
 it burned so *bad*, the doctors couldn't *save me*  
 I was *chillin'* till I got some *penicillin*  
 when I saw *Avy*, I started *illin'*
- B. I met this girl from *Queens*, the freak of my *dreams*  
 she's so *def*, she made me *scream*  
 but I still like *Shauny*, she's real *corny*  
 I really like to *have her* coz' she gets really *horny*

Patterns expand, as more rappers participate in the performance. Groups of rappers, crews like The Treacherous Three and The Fearless Four, were formed and competed with other crews to win the support of the neighbourhood youth.

On another level, there is *external call-and-response*, which takes place between performances. The whole performance thus becomes a call. The rap illustrations already given will have made clear how rappers often boast about their superiority over other rappers. Rivals are insulted, either ironically or seriously. A performance can concentrate on these insults and therefore cause a response by the offended. Through the evolution of hip-hop, one can identify strings of performances in a call-and-response pattern.

There is, for example, the controversy of the Roxannes. Several female rappers, all called Roxanne (in real life or on stage), claimed to be the original, the first Roxanne. The girls copied each other's style ('to bite' in slang), which obviously caused confusion. I believe there were three or four competitors for the title of 'The Real Roxanne'. Each rap performance was a call to the other three, a claim of originality, a cause and effect. A string of raps emerged: 'The Real Roxanne' (Roxanne 1.); 'Roxanne's Revenge' (Roxanne Shanté); 'Roxanne, You're Through' (Sparky D., who is in real life Roxanne 2); 'Bite This!' (Roxanne Shanté); 'The Battle' (Sparky D. vs. the Playgirls); 'Have a Nice Day!' (Roxanne Shanté) and so on. The verbal fight between the girls was not just play; each rap was a serious defence of the rapper's position in the rap world. I can illustrate the controversy with excerpts from these performances:

**The Real Roxanne:**

I'm Roxanne, the lady devastator  
 I make you feel hotter than it is in Grenada  
 the R.O.X.A.N.N.E., Roxanne is who I be  
 I got a little rhyme for you each  
 I seen you girls, they both need a leash  
 such bow-wow babies, I think they got rabies  
 you think you're touchin' me, boy, you must be crazy

**Roxanne Shanté:**

the rhymes you're about to hear me recite  
 are dedicated to all of those who bite  
 talk about how they're so devoted  
 take my rhymes, you swear they wrote it  
 the way I feel right now, you see  
 there ain't another MC in the world like me  
 coz' the rhymes I say, put me at the top  
 defy all you other MCs to stop

**Sparky D:**

see, it must be true what they say about you  
 they made you feel the talk of the town  
 but now, Roxanne, you're gonna look like a clown  
 you sound like you're fresh out of junior high school

if you think you're a rapper, you must be a fool  
 I'm better than ever, you can never be this clever  
 my rap is so strong, it's tougher than leather  
 don't ever forget, this is Sparky D's world  
 an' you're livin' in it!

The external call-and-response also occurs in a more general way. Rapping is then a communicative act between rappers and society. There have been periods in which raps were meaningless, consisting of idle boasts. Other rappers felt propelled to react against this. They accused others of neglecting their responsibility, which in their view is to inform the ghetto youth. They ridicule the macho image of male rappers who boast about their fancy cars and sexual capacities. Rap is to them a means of expression, of speaking up in a nation that ignores the situation of the ghetto. Rap is thus a response to a society that sees ghetto Blacks as second-rank citizens. Or as Doug E. Fresh says: 'the main message to our music is have something to believe in an' be yourself an' let people hear that we're not as stupid and as ignorant as they think we are.' These responses are not directed to specific persons. The rappers want to change certain trends in rap. It is a collective 'response' to a wide scope of 'calls', varying from egocentric boasts to negative attitudes among rappers to the social, political and economic issues of American society. The raps are directed to the Black community and/or mainstream society. It can also be an ideological response, as is the case with the many rappers who are Muslims.

### 5. *The Verbal Battle*

Boasting and bragging is omnipresent in rap music. Rivals are insulted, in a personal or general way, as in this rhyme of Big Daddy Kane: 'I put other rappers out of their misery/ kill 'em in a battle an' make the more history'. I consider the verbal contest or fight, in the context of hip-hop, as a way of speaking in which the speaker tries to prove his superiority by making the best, fastest, most interesting or original rap. The battle is also waged by the wizardry of DJs, but here I shall concentrate on the MCs.

There exists a long tradition of 'boasting and bragging' in combination with verbal insult or fighting. A person who boasts about his verbal, physical or sexual abilities, can expect that his audience will review his claims. Thomas Kochman has described the boasting and the reaction to it in his *Black and White Styles in Conflict* (1981). The verbal expertise that Blacks display in a competition (of rap-rhymes, story-telling etc.), results from the importance of 'orality' in Black culture. The Black community values and encourages verbal qualities, in the present and in the past. In the ghetto, the handling of words is a social skill, learned on the

streets in verbal duels; it is a preparation for later life. In the past, during slavery, oral expression was often the only means Blacks had of alleviating their condition. Literacy was denied to them, contributing to the development of 'oral expression', the importance of which is also reminiscent of the place that it had, and has, in many African cultures. The African tradition of fables was continued and transformed in America; a good story-teller was appreciated for the entertainment value and the social skills that were embedded in his or her stories. Through the animal fable, anger and frustrations were let out. The bluffing animal trickster displayed many verbal manipulative techniques that slaves could use in their everyday life.

In the twentieth century, long narrative poems, collectively known as *The Signifying Monkey*, were written down (see Gates 1988; Levine 1977). The theme was a traditional one: a weak animal, the monkey, uses his tricks to stir trouble between stronger animals; the monkey, free from danger, then enjoys the resulting conflict. The poems were mostly told by men and contain violence, insults and obscenities. For example:

There hadn't been no shift for quite a bit  
 so the Monkey thought he'd start some of his signifying shit.  
 It was one bright summer day the Monkey told the Lion,  
 'There's a big bad burly motherfucker livin' down your way.'  
 He said, 'You know your mother that you love so dear?  
 Said anybody can have her for a ten-cent glass of beer.'

Several speakers invented new couplets, reused older fragments of fables and competed with each other. Signifying developed into a technique of manipulation through indirection, later re-emerging in another verbal game, 'Playing the Dozens' or 'Sounding'. Verbal insults were already part of many stories, but in the ghetto the insults achieved a ritual nature in the verbal game. Beginning with stereotyped expressions, rhymes were created by young Blacks. For example:

Ten pound iron, ten pound steel.  
 Your mother's vagina is like a steering wheel.  
 I hate to talk about your mother, she's a good old soul,  
 she got a ten-ton pussy and a rubber asshole.

These verses can initiate a response like: 'At least my mother ain't no railroad track, laid all over the country.' Ritual insults are typical of young male teenagers. In the speech event, we find two participants and the audience. After an insult by speaker A, the audience gives its evaluation; then speaker B tries to top that insult. If one speaker's rhymes are exhausted, another competitor takes his place. The result is a long exchange of insults and evaluations (e): A1-e-B1-e-A2-e-B2-e-A3-e-C1-... These ritual insults do not have factual value; the claims do not require refutation. On the other hand, the ritual nature can disappear when the insults are highly personalized. The offended speaker might react with a denial, excuses or even violence.

In the 'Dozens', boys distance themselves from the mother-son relationship. The relationship with their peers comes first. Within the peer-group, they express their identity. At the same time, it confirms the separation between life on the streets and life at home. The insults are part of street socialization. The verbal insults are an ambivalent activity combining play with real life; in the ghetto the threat of violence is real, in the 'Dozens' it is hidden under the surface.

Insults are incorporated in many rap lyrics. The insults are speech acts in the larger speech event of the rap performance. Some rappers, like Hostyle, go further than the 'Dozens'; their raps contain highly explicit lyrics, directed not towards mothers, but girlfriends: 'every time my guys haul you, they give me a call / coz' your pussy's like rubber, one size fits all.' Sexual adventures in raps often have ironic or humorous intentions; young Blacks (male and female) test their limits and try out role models.

#### 6. *Language Use in Raps*

The language use of ghetto youth in raps depends on multiple factors. Language competence is developed at home and on the streets, through education and the socialization process. The use of a special language, i.e. slang, is a means of separating oneself from others. In rap, we find a combination of Black English and slang terminology. For most young Blacks, the use of slang is connected with their peer group and life on the streets. Black English is linked with the home and the streets. Many of the grammatical structures of Black English, as described by such linguists as Baugh (1983) and Smitherman (1977), are found in rap lyrics. The following are some common examples:

Deletion of 'to be':

she real skinny  
who you lookin' at with a face like  
that

The invariable 'be':

you be on a mission  
females be out here  
I think it be cheaper

The progressive 'been':

they been goin' at it since time began  
they been had by a hustler

Switching alternation of  
'was'/'were', single/plural:

we was with it  
me an' my girl was watchin' VHS  
you's got to chill  
while they all is gettin' together

|  |   |
|--|---|
| The perfective 'done':                       | look what you done did<br>I was done sneezin' an' coughin'  |
| The past 'seen':                             | she stopped the car when she seen me<br>lookin'<br>I seen him eatin' dogfood out of a can   |
| Double or multiple negation:                 | coz' ain't nothing but sweat inside my<br>hands<br>I don't do no crime<br>it just ain't never gonna end<br>our Chinese brothers don't cop no plea |
| Contraction of 'going' to 'gonna' to<br>'a': | I'm 'a make you dance<br>I'm 'a kill that girl next time I see her  |
| Possessive constructions:                    | who mouths keep yappin' an' flappin'  |
| Switching 'it' / 'there':                    | it's got to be a better way<br>the only way that it's gonna be peace  |
| Varia/hypercorrection:                       | I'm never say I'm sorry<br>you shouldn't 've did that, brother<br>that's the place where me an' he hang<br>out                                    |

These grammatical structures represent only a part of the total grammar of Black English. Along with these structures, the Black youth use a number of slang words in their conversations.

## 7. *Functions and Themes*

### 7.1 Primary functions

The primary functions of rapping are external: I situate them outside the particular performance. These functions relate to the totality of performance. In the early days, the primary function of rapping was to change gang-related violence. Creativity took the place of destruction. Today rapping still conserves this function, although hip-hop now has a new adversary, the crack business. This drug trade is so profitable that many young people would choose a career in the production and distribution of the drug, if it were not for hip-hop. The development of rapping and mixing created another primary function: through music and

rhymes the youth could escape the ghetto environment. With the rise of small, Black record companies, opportunities have grown and talented young Blacks can work their way out of the ghetto. Evidently, one does not get rich instantly (only a happy few achieve this). But the combination of different activities (music, dance etc.) enables youths to improve their lives. With small record editions, stage shows and private parties, young Blacks earn considerably more than they would in, for example, a low-paid restaurant job.

A third primary function of rap is that Black youth now have their own communication medium. They can utter their grievances, warn their fellows or even entertain them in a proper style. Because they themselves created this medium, they can take a stronger position within the Black community. Rap used to be considered by older generations as trendy, something that would fade rather quickly. Now, after about thirteen years, hip-hop is still alive and kicking. The self-respect of Black youth has grown and a positive outlook has developed, despite the negative environment and new risks (such as crack) of the ghetto.

## 7.2 Secondary functions

The above functions result directly from the performances themselves. In the rap material I collected, different themes are elaborated. Every performance shares one secondary function, that is, an expressive one. The speaker gives a performance to bring forward his or her personality. He or she projects an identity, physical appearance and style in the performance, hoping to get a positive response from the audience. Style can be expressed through intonation, body movement, facial expression etc., in a live performance. It is also an internal part of the rap itself. The words one chooses, how one uses those words and builds a rhyme-pattern, in short, the way in which a male or female rapper composes the text, determines style.

Each rapper has his or her own personality, sometimes indicated by his or her name: Sweet Tee, Easy E, Schoolly D, LL Cool J, and so on. DJs take up titles like Grandmaster Flash, Grandmixer DST., Cut Creator, Chuck Chill-Out, Terminator X. Each name is like a 'tag', a marking like those graffiti-artists leave behind on walls, trucks and so on. LL Cool J elaborates on his name:

ladies' love, legend in leather  
 long an' lean, an' I don't wear platter  
 last of the red hot lovin' MCs  
 lookin' for little, that's my theoria  
 goes quick like lightnin', too excitin'  
 lover of ladies, don't allow bitin'  
 level-headed leader, toy-boy feeder  
 could love life an' I rhyme by the beater  
 ladies' love, long, hard an' mean  
 an' now you know what LL means

A second function of rap can be a directive one: rap is used as an instrument to move people to do certain things. With these raps, we observe two secondary functions (expressive and directive); the directive one is dominant. The raps contain an informative component that dominates the communicative interaction between rapper and audience. The directive function can be found in a rap of Kool Moe Dee, 'Go See The Doctor'. In it young people are made aware, in a humorous way, that sexual contacts can have less than pleasant consequences. The rapper gets a sexually transmitted disease and has to see a doctor about a cure:

an' now I know why her ex-boyfriend Dave  
 calls her Mrs Microwave  
 coz' she was hotter than an oven an' I had to learn  
 the hard way, stay in a microwave too long, you could burn.  
 three days later, go see the doctor  
 as I turned around to receive my injection  
 I said: next time I'll use some protection  
 if I see another girl an' I get an erection  
 I'm walkin' in the other direction  
 cos' I don't wanna do the sick sick thang  
 I'm keepin' my prick inside my pants  
 an' if I see another girl an' I know I can rock her  
 before I push up, I make her go see the doctor

The advice given in these raps often has more success than official, government-sponsored campaigns. The information is transmitted through a communication medium of the young people. The ghetto youth identify with the speaker, since he is one of them, he shares their experience, uses the same language and acts according to their norms.

Such information touches various fields: drugs, sex, education, religion, gangs and so on. The directive function is narrowed down by the informative component (theme) of the rap. Because of this close relation between function and theme, further classification will clarify the function of direction with an analysis of themes in raps.

### 7.3 The relation between function and theme

The following classification of raps should be considered as a guide to the vast amount of rap performances, not as a rigid framework of 'rap-ology'. Each rap contains several functions and themes. The classification is set up as follows: a rap in one category is dominated by the characteristics of that category.

### 7.3.1 Party or nonsense raps

This type of rap only has an expressive function. The rapper wants to entertain his audience by displaying his rhyming ability in word-games. During the first period of hip-hop, these raps were very common. In 'Rappers Delight' (one of the first rap records to receive wide distribution) the rapper utters nonsensical, amusing rhymes:

I said a hip hop, the hibby, the hibby  
do the hip hip hoppy  
you don't stop rocking  
until the bang bang boogie  
say up jump the boogie  
to the rhythm of the boogie, the beat

These word rhymes follow the DJ's rhythm. The rapper uses words, but has dropped their semantic value, so that the sound value prevails. 'Funky Rapping' from Rick & DJ Jimmie Jazz is another example. He combines nonsense with meaningful rhymes, in a fast flow of sounds:

you see, fly fly so fly, you wonder why  
you try to write rhymes an' you never do it this way  
you see see, it's me, your MC Ricky  
an' when it comes to rapping, you know I don't play  
I rock rock nonstop, rhyme till you drop  
my beat beat so sweet, you must move your feet  
my style is so funky, yeah, you must admit  
that everytime you hear my rappin'  
it's the best you can git

Nonsense words and sounds have been used to accompany the music for a long time, producing sounds that sometimes imitate tap dancing and rhythms from the dance-halls.

These 'party raps' provide us with excellent material to examine the different kinds of rhyme. Most rhymes use one or more types of rhyme. Any person who hears raps or reads a transcription of a rap, will immediately notice the strong end-rhymes of the verses. The internal rhyme is also clearly represented. An illustration in which both rhymes are present, is the following rap of Run DMC:

coz' the things I *do*, makes me a *star*  
an' you can be *too*, if you know who you *are*  
just put your mind to it, you go real *far*  
like the *pedal* to the *metal* when you're drivin' a *car*

In some raps, the rhyme is repeated in several verses:

I get strong an' *titanic*, do work like a *mechanic*  
 makin' MC's *panic*, they all get *frantic* an' *sceptic*  
 like a girl on a *contraceptic*  
 as I rock forth, hey, what *respect is*

Alliteration and initial rhyme are also used, but less frequently. I have already given LL Cool J's rap, with its constant 'l' alliteration. There are numerous other examples: 'come an' come again as I pick up the pen', 'a midranged migraine, cancered membrane' or 'that he can breathe, think, talk an' bleed'. Note the 'p', 'm/r' and 'b/t' alliterative rhymes.

The rhyme schema in most raps is AA/BB/CC/DD. Among the older raps we find the schema ABBA, but this is not so frequently found in more recent raps. The rhythm of the verse is very variable; in one verse the words are uttered in a fast recitation, while in the next verse words are spun out, sounds are extended. It is difficult to illustrate this in written form—the rhythm is a strong element in the oral performance; perhaps the following verse will clarify the alternation of rhythms:

tantalizin' technical tilt but don't try  
 you spell my name T.O.N.Y.

The alliterative 't' in verse one speeds up the rhythm, while in verse two the spelling of the name slows down the rhythm.

### 7.3.2 Boast/insult raps

This type combines self-appraisal and insults, since in most boast raps insults are included. A rapper boasts about his ability, comparing it with that of (inferior) rivals. I have already described the rap polemic about the 'real' Roxanne. This verbal battle also shows that the art of boasting and insulting is not just a prerogative of male rappers. The macho boasts and exaggerations were originally a male factor for reputation building in the ghetto, but now female rappers are just as good (or bad!).

Boast raps have a dominant expressive function. The rapper puts his personality on stage, hoping his audience will appreciate his competence and confirm his superiority. The boast element in raps is balanced between humorous exaggeration and genuine self-appraisal; the latter has to be validated in reality. It is often a combination of both. Many rappers claim to be the best around, and they try to prove it with original lyrics and highly personalized performances. The threatening insults in boast raps mostly originate from the verbal imagination of a rapper. A rapper tries to intimidate his rivals with words. Listeners do not expect that such threats as 'I'll kill them in a battle' will be carried out.

The raps of this category are defined by two components: insults and boasts. Sweet Tee's rap 'I Got this Feeling' is a good example of a boast rap:

turn up the music, I'm a fanatic  
 make it heard from basement to attic  
 keepin' you hooked like an addiction  
 Sweet Tee is fact not fiction  
 on the records you hear me rhymin'  
 on the charts you see me climbin'  
 to the top of the deck an' I'm dealin'  
 Sweet Tee's an effect an' I got the feeling

Rappers do not only boast about their verbal capacities; they boast about their sexual performance or glorify their neighbourhood. Many misunderstandings arise in the White community about Black bragging and boasting.

### 7.3.3 Fun raps

In this category I place narrative raps. A number of these long rap stories are dominated by humour. There is, for example, Cinderella Dana Dane, a male rapper, who transformed the fairy-tale into a modern setting. Another rapper tells about his experiences one Saturday morning. He wakes up, late for work, rushes out to his car. The car started all right but the tyres were flat; the bus service is suspended; he steals a bicycle, is pursued by a police patrol, but gets distracted by a girl on the sidewalk; he doesn't notice the 'Men at Work' sign and tumbles into a pot-hole, at which point the police arrest him. He ends up in a prison cell, calls his boss to let him know that he won't be in for work. His boss is surprised; it's Saturday, he wasn't supposed to come to work. The telephone is the dominant theme in another story. The owner of the telephone can't handle it very well; he always gets confused with all the girls who call him. This leads to quarrels, fights and he is left by his girlfriend(s). The problem gets solved when he buys an answering machine. Some stories relate unfortunate love affairs.

The common element in all these raps is humour. Indirectly, they tear down the rough macho image that other rappers portray in their boasts. These are stories in which the underdog, the anti-hero is the main character. Such figures can give young people more self-confidence.

### 7.3.4 Message raps

Destructive gang violence led to the hip-hop movement. Rappers produced serious lyrics and closely examined ghetto life. These raps are called message raps. Their function is predominantly directive: the information, not the personality or the style of the rapper, causes the audience to react. The message/information deals with

a variety of subjects. The Communication Posse stimulates young people to continue their education; a rap commercial advertises for an employment programme:

you said that gettin' paid is something you wanted too  
so let the Summer Youth Employment Program benefit you  
now you're young an' you're smart  
an' you wanna be a part  
just apply for the job before the summer start  
don't sit around tryin' to be real cool  
see, at S.Y.E.P. you get paid in full

The raps of Grandmaster Flash & The Furious Five are sharp criticisms of the ghetto condition. They treat such negative aspects of ghetto life as addiction, meaningless violence, homelessness, economic recession, teenage mothers, irresponsible fathers, unemployment, petty crime, suicide etc. Only the strong can survive in such a world, according to The Furious Five. The children come into this world with a clear mind:

remember a child is born with no state of mind  
he was blind to the ways of mankind  
got a smile in on you but he's frownin' too  
becoz' only god knows what you go through

These raps are at the same time a call to think positive, to stand up against oppression. They propose God as a spiritual force instead of the hustlers with their women, money and cars:

'bout to lose your mind becoz' life is hard  
yet you believe in everything but god  
those pretty women, lots of money, yeah, that's alright  
but don't you forget the man with the might

Other rappers carry Allah and Islam on their banner, like Public Enemy, Just Ice and Stetsasonic. With their radical raps, they try to change the conscience of the younger generations. Public Enemy is linked with the Nation of Islam, led by Minister Louis Farakhan. Through schooling and education, they try to boost the self-respect of the youth and plead on behalf of Islam. They try to recreate the Black consciousness that existed in the 1960s. American politics and the world-wide arms race are criticized. 'Reaganomics is in the air / Free me from this nightmare!', exclaimed a solitary rapper in Washington, DC. Shinehead, a New York-based rapper, uses reggae rhythms to express his views:

military arms race an' worldwide famine  
political chess games, bureaucracy, red tape

world lie, genocide, all the things we hate  
 Lebanon, Israel, Iraq an' Iran, my man  
 they been goin' at it since time began  
 b-b-b-backdoor transaction, big time corruption  
 doin' anything possible to win an election  
 you smile for a while, distort the truth  
 try to fool the youth

Numerous raps deal with the dangers of cocaine and crack. MC Sham tells us a love story: he fell in love with a girl, who took all his money but gave little love in return. At the conclusion of the rap, it becomes clear that the girl is a symbol of cocaine. 'Master Crack' is a bitter, direct report on the effect of crack:

like *savoir-faire*, he's everywhere  
 he'll hook an innocent baby coz' he don't care  
 to girls he's a pimp coz' he turns them  
 into the whoreous materialistic nymphomaniacs  
 that'll do anything for master crack  
 give away her body, steal from her brother  
 fight her father or sell her mother  
 coz' when you're possessed by crack  
 god bless your soul, coz' he'll take the rest

Message raps do not only elaborate on the negative aspects of the ghetto. Rappers explain in their raps the evolution and history of hip-hop, they tell how a positive movement grew in the ghetto and how their neighbourhood is a community. Some rappers made raps in support of Jesse Jackson's presidential campaign.

To end this rapid overview of message raps, I will mention some raps that warn young people about sexual diseases. (I have already quoted Kool Moe Dee talking about how he got a venereal disease.) Boogie Down Productions advises the youth to use condoms in the era of AIDS:

here is a message to the superhose  
 just keep in mind when Jimmy grows an' grows  
 so let it, but keep in mind about the epidemic  
 when Jimmy releases, boy, it pleases  
 but what do you do about all these diseases  
 Jimmy is Jimmy, no matter what  
 so take care of Jimmy coz' you know what's up  
 coz' now in winter Aids attacks  
 so run out an' get your Jimmy hats  
 it costs so little for a pack of three  
 Jim Browski  
 good for a present, great for lovers  
 demonstrated by the jungle brothers

Jim Browksi, 'the Black prince', is the personification of the penis. In several raps he emerges as a new hero, a symbol of Black masculinity. There is now, of course, a female counterpart, Jenifa.

### 7.3.5 Sexual raps

Other raps deal with sexuality. I distinguish two types: hard and soft sexual raps. Both have expressive functions. The soft raps are more romantic and usually deal with what happens when boy meets girl. An example of a typical soft rap is:

well, I call my girl up on the phone  
to see if she was busy or all alone  
just waitin' for a signal or a green light  
an' to know if I could see her on that same night  
an' she said, yo L, it's up to you  
then I said okay, I'll be there in a few  
when I got inside, she gave me a squeeze  
I said, let's make love, she said, oh L please  
I knew that I was doin' it well  
coz' every two minutes, she screamed, Oh L!  
I felt so good, I was doggin' her  
it was like a Mobil station, just a pumpin' gas  
better than Michael Jackson an' his white glove

Sexual adventures often have an ironical undertone. Young rappers test their limits and expand the rap themes. It is verbal play in which the youth try out sexual roles and show off to obtain female favours. The actions mirror (and often exaggerate) the sexual behaviour of young adolescents. Boys present themselves as tougher than they are in reality.

A number of raps treat sex in a more explicit way, as in 'X-Rated Lynn', or 'Hey, We Want Some Pussy!':

me an' my homeboys like to play this game  
we call it ant track but some call it the train  
we all would line up in a single file line  
an' take all out turns at wackin' girls behind  
but everytime it came to me, I would shit out o' luck  
becoz' I kick my dick in an' it would get stuck

These rap performances usually consist of two versions. One normal version and another that is self-censored by the rappers. This is the radio version, suitable for broadcasts (though even this is often still considered unsuitable). Potential record

buyers are warned of the explicit nature of the lyrics by a label on the album cover.<sup>2</sup>

### Conclusion

Rapping is a varied and rich activity. It has produced an abundance of material that needs to be examined further by researchers from such several disciplines as anthropology, sociology and linguistics. When one examines the phenomenon, one is fascinated by the immense output from Black communities in the United States (and though not dealt with here, in the United Kingdom). At the same time, we are confronted with the living conditions of the Black population, which have deteriorated since the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. Hip-hop is a successful, creative attempt to provide Black youth with a positive future. The young members of Black communities have developed their own independent, often loud and rebellious alternative to what society had in store for them.

2. This is in response to an initiative of Parents Resource Music Center, a group of conservatives, who consider this music a threat to the moral standards of American youth.

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## ART AND THE AFRICAN WORLD: A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THEIR INTERCONNECTION

KAREL ARNAUT

### *Introduction*

THIS essay offers an historical analysis of how the definition of Africa as another culture is interconnected with the selection and characterization of an African object. Since relatively intense contacts between Africa and Europe were established (c.1600), European natives started defining Africa as an other culture. From the outset, this undertaking of cultural definition was based on the selection of a characteristic artefact. For more than three centuries (c.1600-1900), the fetish was taken to be the cultural object that summarized the cultural identity of Africa. The turn of the century brought about a major change in this cultural discrimination. Then, the intelligentsia of the main European capitals decided to attribute a (primitive) art object to Africa. Traditionally, this *démarche*—from fetish to art object—has been seen as an important step towards a deeper appreciation of

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African culture in general. My analysis shows that 'the African art object'—as it was defined in the first half of this century—shares its main characteristics with the fetish of the previous centuries. 'The African art object', therefore, cannot be taken simply as illustrating a recently discovered cultural equality.

The analysis below sets out to localize where the African fetish and the African art object overlap as instruments of the European intelligentsia in characterizing Africa under a fetish paradigm. In the concluding part of this essay I assess how far current anthropology of African art underwrites this paradigm.

### *The Fetish, an Object and a Religion*

Our 'story of African art' begins about four centuries ago, when the northern European merchants and clerics first recorded their travels to the dark continent.<sup>1</sup> Generally, the most striking aspect of these early travelogues is, as Gerbrands (1990: 14) observes, 'how such early European descriptions of the different customs of another people often show a great deal of impartiality, and even respect'.<sup>2</sup> The language of Pieter de Marees and his Dutch predecessor Paludanus provide good examples of the amazement and fascination that fills the pages of these first accounts.<sup>3</sup> One could easily be moved by the restraint and open-mindedness with which Paludanus tried to make sense of the religious practices of the people of the African Gold Coast. This attitude can be seen in the organization of the texts themselves. In both accounts, the parts on religion comprise a loosely structured collection of stories told to them by their strange customers and trading partners. An attempt to systematize these accounts was not believed to be very promising, because an overall system of religious beliefs was simply not there. Making sense of a pre-religion was definitely a hard job: 'First of all, as far as

1. The following account is based on three original Dutch sources: Paludanus 1912 [1596], Pieter de Marees 1912 [1602] and Willem Bosman 1704. It is not enough to provide conclusive evidence, but it helps to illustrate further the much better documented study of Pietz (1985, 1987, 1988). My line of reasoning, however, differs substantially from Pietz's.

2. It has been drawn to my attention that 'impartiality' is a problematic term in any account of cultural contact. Whatever the specific meaning Gerbrands wants to convey, I intend to contrast the open-mindedness of the early travellers with the religiously or ideologically dogmatic stance of later travellers and philosophers.

3. Pietz (1987: 39) refers to de Marees as a Calvinist Dutch traveller. However, both attributes ('Dutch' and 'Calvinist') are problematic. In the introduction to the 'Lindtschoten Vereniging' edition of 1912 the editor (S. P. L'Honoré Naber) cites evidence (his name and the Flemish dialect words) to the fact that de Marees is Flemish or at least the son of Flemish immigrants. In the argument below I shall follow Naber and consider de Marees as a Catholic Flemish traveller.

their Religion is concerned they don't possess any knowledge of God nor of his commandments, Some of them worship the Sun and the Moon: others worship certain trees, or the earth, because it brings them food' (Paludanus 1912: 266-7).<sup>4</sup> As far as material culture is concerned there is a double standard. If any objects are referred to as particularly interesting they are either objects of economic value for the Europeans, often gold, or objects that are highly valued by the indigenous people. A good example of such an object is the fetish, an object that is a 'trifle' from the material point of view but is treated with utmost care and attention by the Africans. When interrogated about the workings of their magical instruments, we hear a diversity of reasoning: fairy-tales about powerful amulets manipulated by dangerous wizards and witches, thrilling accounts of disease, murder and mutilation, and fragments of historical lore about poisoning, warfare and famine. De Marees gives us a lively chronicle of these unbelievable 'explanations' that fits nicely with what the Portuguese intended to convey by the term *feitiço*: objects with spiritual power, constituting the material component of a pre-religion.<sup>5</sup>

A hundred years later this idea had changed substantially. The fetishes, and the indigenous practices and beliefs surrounding them, were inscribed in a newly found paradigm: fetishes are evidence of idolatry and function within a religious system that can be compared with Catholicism. That is the message contained in the 'Tenth Letter' of the Protestant traveller Willem Bosman (1704: 136-52). The paradigm of Catholicism proved extremely productive. It enabled Bosman to describe both the newly discovered religion as false as well as the obviously false beliefs as religious. In other words, Bosman makes 'Guinea'—at an earlier stage a locus of paganism and numberless exotic practices—intelligible as a community of heretics whose material culture and social organization exemplify their (false) beliefs.

Idolatry plays a key role in this process. On the one hand, it is used in its then contemporary meaning as defined by the Protestant-Catholic iconoclastic controversy: the fetish cult rests on an inadmissible fusion between economic and spiritual interests. As in Europe during the Reformation, the priests<sup>6</sup> are the ones who 'deceive these credulous people ruthlessly and do them out of their money' (Bosman 1704: 143).<sup>7</sup> This evidently makes a very active reference to New

4. 'Eerstelijcken belanghende hare Religie en weten van God ofte zijn ghebodt gants niet, de sommige aenbidden de Sonne ende Maene: andere sekere bomen, ofte die aerde, om dat zij daer voetsel van genieten.' Unless otherwise indicated all translations into English are mine.

5. Pietz (1987: 39) refers to de Marees as the first northern traveller to introduce the term *fetisso* into the languages of northern Europe.

6. '*De Papen*': literally, 'the priests who recognize the Pope' (Bosman 1704: 143).

7. '...weten dees ligtgeloovige Menschen dapper bij de Neus om te leyden en in de beurs te tasten.' Readers who are familiar with Dutch might be puzzled by the contraction of 'om de tuin lijden' and 'bij de neus nemen' to 'bij de neus lijden'. However, this construction reinforces the active element in the policy of the clergy to deceive their flock.

Testament iconoclasm, that is, Jesus's spectacular action of removing the merchants from the temple. On the other hand, the 'worshipping of wood' has a whole range of historical and Old Testament references.<sup>8</sup> Its worshippers can be characterized as adhering to an opposite, thus false, belief system. The fault of the idolaters is to mistake the object of worship, namely God, for the object worshipped, namely the idol. As we shall see shortly, both aspects of the religious controversy between Protestants and Africans were to be rationalized in the following centuries by the Enlightenment philosophers Kant, Hume and Voltaire, and their successors Herder and Hegel.<sup>9</sup>

### *The Fetish, a Religious Object and a World-View*

By the middle of the eighteenth century, African artefacts and African religions were seen and understood as strongly interconnected through the idolatrous beliefs of the worshippers. Moreover, Africa had become a 'thinkable' unit defined by the misconceived thoughts of its inhabitants. Voltaire states this position in a general remark: 'They [Africans] are incapable of concentrating; they hardly combine, and it seems as though they are made neither for the advantages nor for the disadvantages of our philosophy' (1963, ii: 306).<sup>10</sup>

As early as 1748, Hume knew that the 'Negroes' were naturally inferior to the Whites because there were no 'ingenious manufactures amongst them, no arts, no sciences' (1825: 521). Drawing on the evidence provided by Hume, Kant could only speculate on the reasons for this undeveloped African mind and—how surprisingly—comes to the conclusion that: 'The religion of fetishes so widespread among them [the Negroes of Africa] is perhaps a sort of idolatry that sinks as deeply in the trifling as appears to be possible to human nature' (1960: 111). To put it in Pietz's words: 'African society was seen to be structured and perverted by the core religious institution of fetish worship: an order of obligation...rather than recognition of that rational rule of law and contract' (Pietz 1988: 115). Opposing 'fetish' to anything 'law-governed' is quite illuminating. It conveys the

8. That these 'Old Testament' connotations of iconoclasm were also very active in the following (eighteenth) century is obvious in Voltaire's 'Essai sur les mœurs' (1778). There he gives a lengthy account of the idolatrous controversy between 'us' and the Jews, immediately following a short statement on serpent worship in Africa (Voltaire 1963: 13-18).

9. Pietz (1988: 105) regards Hume, Voltaire, de Brosses and Kant as members of an anti-Leibnizian moiety among the champions of the Enlightenment who read and appropriated the northern European travelogues.

10. 'Ils ne sont pas capables d'une grande attention; ils combinent peu, et ne paraissent faits ni pour les avantages ni pour les abus de notre philosophie.'

idea that Africans dwell in a world that is exemplarily a non-universe: it is lawless. This was already implied in the rejection of the 'Law of God' by the idolaters. In the course of the nineteenth century this idea was developed further along two lines: lawlessness in interpersonal behaviour and therefore social organization, and the impossibility of the African seeing his world as governed by natural laws.

These two ideas underlie Hegel's account of Africa in his lectures of 1822-31 on the philosophy of history (see Hegel 1956, 1975). On the one hand, intersubjectivity as defined by moral relations is entirely absent. In Africa presumably no respect whatsoever exists for the other human being: the African murders his enemies as well as his friends and relatives, drinks their blood and eats their flesh (1975: 182-4). On the other hand, there seems to be 'no awareness of any substantial objectivity—for example of God or the Law' (ibid.: 177). Therefore, one cannot speak of a religion or a constitution in the proper sense of the word. Moreover, the African lacks any (historical) consciousness, his actions and thoughts 'appear' at random, even by surprise.

This state of affairs is particularly troublesome for the philosopher who wants to come up with an explanation. How can one predict the unpredictable, historicize the unhistorical, moralize the immoral, in other words, 'intentionalize' the unintentional? Obviously, one cannot, unless 'unintentionality' can be described as the intention of the unintentional actor. For that matter, Hegel can rely on the African expertise of his predecessors, the Protestant travellers. Their 'African fetish religion' offers him the necessary conceptual tools to fulfil his philosophical mission. The 'Guinea' of the eighteenth century was a religion, constituted of false beliefs, the products of which were numberless fetishes. Fetishes were worshipped objects, instances of the failure to distinguish between the worshipped god and the objects used for worshipping the god. As well as being a deadly sin for the Protestants, it was a fundamental error of reasoning for a rationalist. In other words, the false beliefs observed by the Protestants became the fetish mode of thought for Hegel. Consequently, what the former saw as an African religion became a rationalization of that mode of thought, or a world-view.

On this basis, Hegel could easily argue (ibid: 181) that 'a fetish...has no independent existence as an object of religion, and even less as a work of art' while not contradicting his sources, which described the fetish as a religious object. The categories 'religion' and 'art' are used here as universal categories, in the same sense as we would describe Hegel's account as (the reconstruction of) a world-view. In order to make it clearer I can draw a parallel. For the Protestant traveller it was obvious that the strange practices and objects sprang forth from religious beliefs. These beliefs were false, in the sense that the Africans did not believe in one God and therefore worshipped religious objects. For Hegel it was obvious that fetish manipulations were the outcome of a particular mode of thinking. This mode of thinking was false, because it lacked the objective category of God, and therefore the Africans had no religious objects. That the atheism of the Africans was an illustration of their 'bad reason' was already

advocated by Voltaire when he started his description of primitive religion with: 'the knowledge of a god, creating, remunerating, and revenging, is the product of cultivated rationality' (1963: i, 13).<sup>11</sup>

Drawing together the above remarks, we are led to conclude that from the end of the eighteenth century onwards a distinction is made between intra-cultural concepts and descriptive, universal concepts. The new descriptive category that we see originating here, namely world-view, receives its status and content from the paradigm of religion introduced by the Protestant travellers. But notice a major transformation. For the Protestants to evaluate fetishism as a non-religious religion was the expression of a religious controversy, for the Enlightenment to describe fetishism as a non-cultural culture was to state a scientific fact. As noted above, the Protestants used the fetish as the main witness of an idolatrous religion, the philosophers extrapolated the workings and nature of the fetish to a particular, African and primitive mode of thought. Two main characteristics of the fetish mode of thought are particularly relevant for our subject.

First, the absence of any 'distance of objectivity' between man and his world prevents him from seeing natural phenomena as empirical data. Africans dwell in a conceptual world, undisturbed by the falsifications that, if simply observed in the broad daylight of reason, could lead to correction and verification. Unfortunately, the belief in the fetish is blind, and Hegel can report a number of instances when 'many negroes were torn to pieces by wild beasts despite the fact that they wore amulets' (1975: 218). In more general terms, the universe of the African was 'immanent': no differentiation was made between cause and effect, between intention and action, between concept and reality.

Secondly, the absence of subjectivity is also described in 'immanent' terms. The African does not distinguish between his physical power and his spiritual motivation or in Hegel's words: 'it is no positive idea, no thought which produces these commotions;—a physical rather than a spiritual enthusiasm' (ibid.: 98).

This is also a main characteristic of the fetish object itself: the African idol was material and spiritual 'taken together' and its interconnection with the world outside was one of power. Whether one can really understand this or not is not our concern here. What we do not have to understand are the anti-terms rather than the terms they were the opposite of. And these are fairly clear: the fetish is *not* a material representation of a spiritual state. Consequently, the fetish is not so much a representational object as an object that represents a world-view where objects exemplify the non-representational thinking of its users. Now it becomes more intelligible how Hegel had an argument sufficient to deny the Africans their 'art object' (ibid.: 181).

The fetish after all was exactly the opposite of a work of art. Although some African artefacts may have looked naturalistic or resembled previous objects in a tradition, their very nature was non-representative and non-historical. It would

11. 'La connaissance d'un dieu, formateur, rémunérateur et vengeur, est le fruit de la raison cultivé.'

take me another essay to prove that it was not Hegel's idiosyncratic definition of art that prevented him from seeing the African artefact as an art object. Most probably, it is not a matter of definition at all. As Summers (1987) and Hulse (1990) have recently pointed out, the art object—when in the Renaissance it received and could only receive the status it still holds—was generally identified as an instance of imitation that 'copied nature or the works of others while simultaneously transcending them' (Hulse 1990: 158). This is to say that the eighteenth century could build on an image of the fine arts as both theoretical and historical. The arts did not only reproduce, they also added a meaning to the representation by conveying a message about the reality depicted or by commenting on earlier interpretations. The major consequence of this is that the art tradition becomes reflexive in the person of the artist. He is the one who authorizes the 'slice' of theory and history inserted in the representation. The meaning of an art object is the product of an intentional process of reflexive depiction.

Overlooking the above statements, we might not be surprised that for the early nineteenth-century intellectual an 'African art' was simply unthinkable because the African world supposedly lacked all critical aspects of an aesthetic attitude: reflection, intentionality, history, contemplative mood and so on. However, this is a strange way of putting it. As we recall, Africa was defined under the paradigm of an anti-culture: it was not because Africans did not have art that they were non-cultural. Our argument shows that it went the other way around: first Africans were non-cultural, and consequently they had no art.

What is more surprising is the fact that half a century later, the African art object is discovered. Before we take a closer look at the 'miracle of African art' we must focus on the other side of the anti-defining paradigm. Africa was not merely described and explained by stressing the absence of intellectual qualities, it was also characterized by over-stressing the presence of non-intellectual qualities. Two of these have already been mentioned: the African's attitude was anti-empirical, thus conceptual, and his relation to the surrounding world was not one of 'reflection about' but 'reaction upon': representation was replaced by power. These two *epitheta ornans* (conceptual and powerful) of the African mind were nicely underpinned by accentuating the non-intellectual quality *par excellence*, i.e. emotion.

Hegel's contemporary Herder, while writing on such serious matters as the philosophy of history (1800), could allow himself a semi-pornographic style when turning to the subject of the 'Organization of the People of Africa' (ibid.: 145-56). The poor intellectual qualities of the 'descendants of Ham' were due to a mere construction fault of the Almighty whose creative error was physiologically balanced by the generous gift of some extremely sensual organs. In sum: 'that finer intellect, which the creature, whose breast swells with boiling passions beneath this burning sun, must necessarily be refused, was countervailed by a structure altogether incompatible with it' (ibid.: 151).

We have dwelled long enough in the *antichambre* of idealist cultural science and the curiosity cabinet of cultural artefacts. It is time to make our way to the atelier of the French cubist and German expressionist, the scene of the miraculous conception and birth of a bicephalous creature: the primitive masterpiece, baptized with the name of 'African art'.

### *A Cultural Miracle: African Art*

In an essay written sometime between 1935 and 1951, Malraux tried to catch the *fin-de-siècle* atmosphere that surrounded the post-impressionist artist. He remembered saying to an audience, some twenty years before: 'Europe, then at the height of her power, seemed to be calling in the arts of the non-European world to counteract the poison in her blood' (1954: 541). The poison was 'that belief in Free Will which since the days of Rome had been the white man's birthright' (ibid.: 543), and it could only be counteracted by 'consent to the supremacy of that part of him which belongs to the dark underworld of being' (ibid.). This supplies us with the ingredients necessary for constituting the environment that gave birth to the notion of primitive art in general and African art in particular.

First, we must take into account the changing context of modern art in the West. Although it would be more appropriate (given the previous discussion) to rely on the aesthetic theories of such writers as Croce and Bell to sketch the changing mood of the European art scene, it is not less accurate to let the artists speak for themselves. The 'free will' Malraux talked about ventilates the major concern of the artist: the empirical paradigm that has reigned over the fine arts must be broken down entirely.

To spell out the long evolution preceding this 'decision' would take us far away from the subject of this essay. Let it suffice to say that from the eighteenth century philosophical aesthetics formulated the non-intellectual qualities (subjectivity, creativity, non-conformism) of the art work in order to find a basis for distinguishing art from science and philosophy (see Eagleton 1990). The Post-Impressionist moment in the struggle for the autonomous work of art was also part of this double process. On the one hand, it aimed at disconnecting art from verifiable science and falsifiable philosophy; hence it refused to take up the empirical challenge as formulated in the Renaissance. On the other hand, it kept underlining the status of its content as intuitive philosophy, which combined the psychologically deep and the sociologically critical in the person of the artist and his products.

Secondly, we must assess the image of the primitive and his artefacts in the intellectual and artistic circles of the end of the nineteenth century. The above analysis provided us with two major elements of the 'African character': the fetish mode of thought—as the fetish object itself, which served as the model on which

the particular mode of thought was built—was ‘immanent’ (no differentiation between cause and effect, intention and action, idea and form, and so on) and anti-empirical (enclosed, conceptual). These anti-capacities were compensated for by such non-capacities as emotional abundance and physical strength.

In the hands of the *fin-de-siècle* artists, the non-intellectual qualities of the primitive mind and the European work of art were combined. This gave birth to the ‘primitive work of art’, while fostering the ongoing European quest to define the ‘artistic mind’ in non-intellectual terms. By formulating the aesthetic paradigm shift in this way we have taken one unsupported step: the way in which the non-capacities of the primitive were transformed into seemingly positive qualities.

This, indeed, had been the ‘task’ of the late nineteenth-century historians and ethnologists, and they fulfilled it. Let us return to the anti-empiricism of the primitive. This was transformed into a more positive ‘attitude’, but it remained the very foundation of his world-view. When describing *Fetischismus* as ‘the religious worshipping of perceptible objects’<sup>12</sup> by the savages, Schultze (1871: 1) advocated a truly anthropological understanding of this strange phenomenon by looking deeper into ‘the state of consciousness of the Primitive’ (ibid.: 29).<sup>13</sup> His conclusion was that: ‘consciousness, world and intention are harmoniously interconnected’ (ibid.: 54).<sup>14</sup>nn

A more direct metaphor for anti-empiricism was used by Avebury. Here the fantasy world of de Marees’ Guinea is made intelligible as Hegel’s non-objective, world-blind, world-view: ‘religious ideas of lower races are intimately associated with, if indeed they have not originated from, the condition of man during sleep, and especially from dreams’ (Avebury 1911: 225).

Subsequently, Preuss (1904-5) described the primitive interaction with the world as founded on *Zauberglauben*, or as Vatter put it, the belief in ‘the power of intention, the identity of intention and reality’ (Vatter 1926: 27-28).<sup>15</sup> This makes Malraux’s statement that ‘an African mask is not a fixation of a human expression; it is an apparition’ (1954: 565) perfectly intelligible.

At this point, however, the early culture theorists are once again confronted with Hegel’s problem of ‘intentionalizing the unintentional’. Moreover, the artists and the ethnologists are forced to come to terms with the imperative of representation (intention—action; idea—form). That is to say, the claim that the art object is a pure ‘apparition’ may be an illustration of exotic ‘thinking’; as a new description of artistic inspiration, it was simply not good enough. For this problem, an inter-cultural solution was devised. That is to say, the construction at hand is believed to be based on ‘knowledge’ of the primitive in general and of

12. ‘...einer *religiösen* Verehrung sinnlich wahrnehmbarer Gegenstände’ (italics mine).

13. ‘...denn Bewusstseinszustand der Wilden’.

14. ‘...denn Bewusstsein, Welt und Wille sind solidarisch verbunden’.

15. ‘...die Macht des Wunsches, [an] die Identität von Wunsch und Wirklichkeit’.

the African in particular, as it was displayed in the literature on the religion, history and evolution of these peoples. Once again, the matter is zestfully articulated by Malraux:

Then we have what are often mis-called fetishes—masks and figures of ancestors: an art of collective subjectivism, so to speak, in which the artist invents forms deriving from his inner consciousness, yet recognizable by all, thus mastering with his art not only what the eye perceives but what it cannot see. (1954: 547)

This text summarizes the three main elements of the solution: 1. Generally, art is the expression of inner realities and not the representation of the external reality. Here, the 'conceptual' attitude of the primitive and the depth of the artistic psyche are reconciled. 2. As far as the mechanics of communication are concerned, art is a *direct* expression of 'the deep', which gives it its frankness and power. The European art object should borrow these characteristics from the fetish: it should be animated, personal, and vigorous.<sup>16</sup> 3. As far as the content is concerned, the work of art conveys the collectively felt rather than the universally known. This comprises two aspects. First, the unarticulated beliefs of the primitive are coupled with the non-discursive nature of the art object. Secondly, the universal value of the content of art (a claim inherent in its very status) is transformed into 'collective relevance'.

#### *Still, an Artwork and a Primitive*

The intercultural meeting of the fetish and the art object resulted in two new phenomena. It produced a European art object that resembled a fetish and an artistic mind that aspired to the directness and simplicity of the primitive mind. This, for me, is the less surprising aspect of this evolution. After all, the primitive, since its very origin in the nineteenth century, was defined as non-intellectual, and European art, since its aesthetic awakening in the eighteenth century, wanted to be

16. It would take us too far to illustrate this assertion comprehensively. A few quotes should suffice to explain what I mean. According to Fry (1990: 72), writing in 1920, the African artist 'manages to give to his forms their disconcerting vitality, the suggestion that they make of being not mere echoes of actual figures, but of possessing an inner life of their own. If the negro artist wanted to make people believe in the potency of his idols he certainly set about it in the right way.' Pietz (1985: 11-12) draws our attention to a text in which Leiris (1929) describes all true art as being like a fetish. Leiris elaborates a number of fetish metaphors, and it is really astonishing how these link up so directly with the 'fetish mode of thinking' theory of the previous century. He starts by comparing true fetishism with 'love' as the direct expression of feeling from the impassioned body to the objective world. He pursues this metaphor by comparing the art object with 'tears' as intensely personal projections. Finally, he associates tears with 'moments of crisis' which 'appear' in the life of everyone. The opinion of the German Expressionists is voiced by Nolde when he stated 'we are now seeking guidance from the vigorous primitives' (quoted in Herman 1978: 128).

defined as non-intellectual. In the intercultural space of the turn of the century they could help each other, so to speak, in their conflict with the mainstream. However, there was a major difference in agency between the primitive and the cubist. The latter's newly found self-definition was the outcome of an active policy, while the former's new image was just another not-that-negative redefinition by just another interest group. Moreover, we witness the appearance of a new primitive fetish that resembles an art object and a new primitive mind that could be compared with the artistic mind. These are the 'historical artefacts' anthropologists in general and anthropologists of art in particular have to come to terms with.

When describing the primitive mind and African cosmology in even more modern terms as 'traditional', and qualifying this statement, as Lévy-Bruhl did, by referring to 'the law of participation' in primitive mentality as opposed to the 'logical law of contradiction' in modern thinking,<sup>17</sup> one should become at least suspicious about the fetish origin of these ideas. However, there are more enlightened attempts by respectable scholars, and by Africans themselves, to try to define their thinking in terms of non-literate world-views and non-scientific cosmologies. Although it is outside the scope of this essay, and I will not pursue them in any depth, two remarks are indispensable. Whatever the positive aura of 'holistic' thinking or 'practical' reasoning may be in the 'century of alienation' and the 'decade of the environment', anthropology can no longer justify its relevance by rationalizing these crises and/or *vogues* as non-Western philosophies. It must remember that the non-Westerner (the very term) was made to that purpose by the Catholics, Protestants, Rationalists and Idealists. In reproducing this underlying model it is less a cultural science than a discipline erected for the purpose of scientifically legitimizing old cultural oppositions. That is to say, in that case anthropology is not *about* this historical process but *part of* this anti-culture tradition. The phenomenon of making sense of other cultures by constructing an explanatory scheme (beliefs, world-view, cosmology etc.) that is by definition emic but not explicit, and non-discursive for the indigenous people but transcribable by the anthropologist, seems to be a highly ambiguous undertaking. It seems at once metaphysically necessary and scientifically impossible (see Boyer 1990). At least anthropology could make a start by rethinking the very concept, not as a methodological tool, nor as a theoretical instrument, but as a cultural imperative.

Returning to the proper subject of this essay, the twentieth century accepted the legacy of 'an African fetish that resembled an art object'. That it remained a fetish attributed with art qualities is expressed in the terms 'African art' or 'primitive art' (or numerous alternatives) themselves: it was art but not quite so. Moreover, 'fetish' was both an object (idol) and an explanation of that object

17. In the context of a discussion of African art it is interesting to note that in Rattray's *Religion and Art in Ashanti*, Blake refers to Lévy-Bruhl's insightful account of pre-logical systems and primitive mentality as a basis of understanding Ashanti art from the Ashanti point of view (Blake 1927: 346).

(idolatry), both a confused artefact (matter and spirit) and a confused mind (idea and form), both a medium (art) and a world-view (African). This seems to be the ultimate trap of 'African art(s)': if Africa has art it is not really art, and if it has no art it is not really a culture. The task of initiating the dismantling of this dilemma rests on the shoulders of historical anthropologists, rather than in the hands of the empirical fieldworker.

### *Conclusion*

Analysing the developments in the European art scene about a century ago, we could understand the historical conditions under which an African art object could originate at the crossroads of an 'art discourse' and a 'primitive discourse'. Nevertheless, however confused and misconceived discourses may be, they have 'real' consequences. The more so because the discourse is taken over by cultural specialists, such as anthropologists and art historians. What they took over in the first place was a cultural art object, that is, an object that was explainable in terms of the culture that produced it. Here already we encounter a paradigmatic difference from Western art. As mentioned earlier, the Western art object is minimally a meaningful object, and it was the 'decision' of the Renaissance to consider meaning as the reflection (theoretical and historical) of the artist inserted in the form he or she created. Moreover, this personalized meaning-making was the precondition for the development of an aesthetic psychology that located the value and status of art in the mental capacities of the artist. (Indeed, it was the ultimate reason for calling in the help of the 'primitive mind' to substantiate that psychology.)

However, for African art objects the story is quite different. As far as meaning in general was concerned, a model was immediately available: the fetish paradigm was taken over from the culture theorists of the early nineteenth century. If the fetish was an exemplar of a world-view, the art object was the exemplar of its surrounding culture. In other words, as for the Protestants and the Rationalists, the art object incorporated 'cultural meaning' as such. Therefore, the European artist could easily be replaced by another relevant 'cultural unit': the tribe. Moreover, the 'cultural meaning' encoded in the art object was not to be found in indigenous reflection or verbalization but in the reconstruction of the anthropologist. To draw our parallel further, the European artist did not want to give a verbal account of his 'meaning', and the African tribe could not do so.

This brings us to our main argument. The African art object is a historical combination of a fetish and an explanation thereof, at once an artefact and a world-view. On the one hand, it stands for a cultural universe that should be explained in its own terms. For that matter, cultural relativism should be stretched to its very limits. No exotic beliefs in rain-making amulets or fertility-bringing rituals exceed

the imagination of the non-Westerner. On the other hand, it is a work of art invested with the philosophical intuition of its maker, the tribe. Like the artist who projects his whole world, not least the unconscious part, into the objects he or she creates, the tribe projects what it paradigmatically cannot know into its ethnic masterpieces.

Therefore, if Africans have art, it is not really art. The tribe does not reflectively authorize the meaning-making process that art is. Now we know at least the historical background of this construction. The post-impressionist crisis did not define Western art, it redefined it. And it did so not by abolishing the relevance of the artistic message—a 'cultural relativism' applied to artists—but by accentuating the subjective in the mechanics (psychology) of invention and communication. In the same context, African art was not defined, instead the African fetish was redefined. And not by extending the relevance of its message—an artistic universalism applied to tribes—but by stressing the artistic mechanics (fetish psychology) of deep invention and non-discursive communication.

Therefore, if Africans have no art, they do not really have culture. If the tribe has no exemplary media for expressing its deepest thoughts (philosophy and art) or its cultural meanings (world-view, cosmology) how can we think of it as a culture, even in the broadest sense of the word? The question 'Art or not art?' might seem to carry the load of persisting cultural relativism or reactionary absolutism. However, I think it does not. As far as I can see now, the matter can be taken further in two directions.

First, one can answer the question positively: Africans have art. Consequently one will be forced to ask the proper art-historical questions. One will question the historical nature of African art traditions. If dealt with seriously (see McLeod n.d.), it can provide a way to start exploring, for example, other time systems, say experiences of time exemplified in the creation and use of artefacts. One can also investigate meaning-making as a reflective, purposeful and culture-creating process. If pursued earnestly, as by Morphy (1991) in his study of Yolgnu (Australian Aboriginal) art, it can open the way to an exploration of painting as a constitutive activity for establishing relationships between people, their landscape and their history. These are two examples of how applying a universal sensitively can be the beginning of exploring cultural differences on a more relevant level than: 'although they don't know, they believe...'

Secondly, one can answer the question negatively: Africans do not have art. Then, evidently, nothing else is said than: art is a culturally specific way of making (sense of) one's world. This is also an anthropologically relevant point of departure. The question then, however, will be put in a somewhat different way. Not 'How can people make a culture without art?', but 'Why do people need art to make their culture?'

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## SOME NOTES ON DEFINING AESTHETICS IN THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL LITERATURE

WILFRIED VAN DAMME

### *Introduction*

As is commonly accepted, the term 'aesthetics', or to be more precise *aesthetica*, was introduced in the middle of the eighteenth century by the German philosopher Baumgarten (see, for example, Tatarkiewicz 1980: 311). In a more or less well-defined manner it has since found its way particularly into the art-philosophical and art-historical literature, as well as, of course, into everyday language. In this essay I shall look more closely into the meaning of the concept of aesthetics in the anthropological literature, including art-historical writings focusing on non-Western art. In doing so, I shall provide a critical survey of the definitions of the term 'aesthetics' in that literature.

In those societies traditionally studied in anthropology, it appears that a term comparable to the Western word 'aesthetics' does not exist; but as we have just seen, it did not exist within the Western tradition either until two and a half centuries ago. Yet what is nowadays called aesthetics had at that time been discussed in Western philosophy for more than two thousand years (cf. Tatarkiewicz 1980: 311-12). Similarly, we may expect aesthetics to be part of other cultural traditions as well. Still, as a term or concept, and especially as a systematic study, aesthetics originated in the West against a particular cultural and philosophical background, and with a particular historical evolution. So, if we want to apply the notion of aesthetics to non-Western cultures, we are confronted with 'the risks involved in "exporting" concepts' (Maquet 1979: 47). But, as Maquet has suggested, 'by proceeding cautiously, at the prudent pace of

scholarly endeavors, one may prune off a concept and make out of it a useful cross-cultural tool' (ibid.). The critical examination of definitions will therefore concentrate on testing their cross-cultural applicability by confronting them with relevant empirical data yielded by anthropological fieldwork. In other words, it will be asked whether the proposed definitions of aesthetics are broad enough to encompass all the phenomena that, from the point of view of different non-Western cultures, can be considered structurally and qualitatively akin to the phenomena dealt with in Western aesthetics. Only when this requirement is met can aesthetics be regarded as a useful concept within anthropology.

### *Traditional Definitions*

To begin with, Stout conceives the term aesthetics in a dictionary sense as 'referring to the branch of philosophy dealing with the beautiful, chiefly with respect to theories of the essential character of the beautiful and the tests by which the beautiful may be judged' (1971: 30). Whereas the first part of Stout's definition reflects the concerns of the mainly theoretically orientated Western philosophy of art, the second part ('the tests by which...') could be said to point to the empirical research that is characteristic of much of the anthropological inquiry into aesthetics.

Lawal's definition of aesthetics has resemblances to Stout's: 'aesthetics deals with the philosophy of the beautiful as well as with the standards of value in judging art and other aspects of human life and culture' (Lawal 1974: 239). Just like—in principle—Stout's definition, Lawal's has the advantage of not restricting the object of aesthetics to what is traditionally considered 'art' (sculpture, painting, music etc.)—I assume that this is what Lawal means by 'art'—but leaves room for the study of the aesthetic aspects of cultural phenomena besides art, although his definition is rather vague on this point. The circumscription of aesthetics given by Lawal, however, also has a negative overlap with the one offered by Stout: both researchers confine aesthetics to the study of the beautiful, which, as we shall see, does injustice to the diversity within the aesthetic realm.

This restriction to the beautiful is also found in Mveng's definition: 'aesthetics is both science and art. It has as its object the norms of the Beautiful as they are revealed throughout works of art. Thus its domain embraces the whole of artistic and literary expression' (1975: 68).<sup>1</sup> When one bears in mind, on the one hand, that Mveng's definition restricts itself to the beautiful, and

1. 'L'esthétique est à la fois science et art. Elle a pour objet les normes du Beau telles qu'elles s'expriment à travers les oeuvres d'art. Son domaine embrasse donc la totalité des expressions artistiques et littéraires.' This and subsequent translations are mine.

realizes, on the other, that both in the West, and in, for example, Sub-Saharan Africa, certain art forms are purposely created to convey ugliness (see Van Damme 1987: 53-66), it becomes clear that Mveng's conclusion, namely that aesthetics, as defined as such, refers to the *whole* of artistic and literary expressions, cannot be justified in practice.

When Thompson, one of the first researchers to draw attention to the existence of intentional ugliness in African art, introduces the term 'anti-aesthetic' in talking about the deliberately ugly masks of the Yoruba (Nigeria) (1971b: chs. 3 and 4), he suggests similarly that the aesthetic is equivalent to the beautiful (or possibly other aesthetic categories, with the exception, in any event, of the ugly), which would exclude intentional ugliness from the study of aesthetics. This exclusion is avoided, for example, by Biebuyck who uses the expression 'aesthetic of the ugly' (1976: 346) in referring to some intentionally ugly sculptures of the Lega of Zaïre.

Already in 1961 Vandenhoute warned his colleagues that 'as long as the aesthetic experience of a work of art is conceived as equivalent to the perception of the beautiful, it will be difficult or even impossible for us to use the word "aesthetic" in an ethnological study, as well as in a sociology of art in general' (1961: 375). Indeed, as Vandenhoute adds, were we to equate the aesthetic with the beautiful, a great part of artistic production would be excluded from ethno-artistic study. He proposes to remain true to *aesthesis*, in the sense of perception, and to leave room for the perceptive experience not only of beauty, but also of ugliness, the comic, the tragic and so on (1960: 8; 1961: 375).

Armstrong's definition of aesthetics, too, leaves room for categories other than the beautiful: 'the study of the physical properties of one or more affecting works is aesthetics' (1971: 47). For not only beauty—a term which Armstrong himself wants to avoid, since he feels it is too ethnocentrically based (*ibid.*: 10)—can evoke an affective response, but also, for example, ugliness.

Although one could of course give a very broad definition of 'work of art', Vandenhoute seems to restrict himself largely to the visual arts. Such a restriction is absent in Fernandez's definition: 'aesthetics...has as one of its primary concerns the manner in which values, whether colors or tones or even words for the poet, are formally arranged in space' (1971: 357). Fernandez also defines aesthetics as referring to 'notions...of preferred form in object and action' (*ibid.*: 358). Besides avoiding a restriction to the visual arts (see also the definition of aesthetics supplied by Kaeppler 1971: 175), Fernandez thus also leaves room for aesthetic categories other than the beautiful, since what should be regarded as 'preferred form' depends on the context. Again, the existence of intentionally ugly art forms can serve as an example here. I feel that another advantage of Fernandez's definition resides in the fact that form and content are not strictly separated. For Fernandez talks about both 'form' and 'value', and better still, the formal arrangement of values. That in his view, 'value' embraces not only colours, tones or words (as in the definition

given above), but can be more broadly interpreted as referring to culturally defined content, becomes clear from a reading of the whole of his article on the aesthetics of the Fang of Gabon (1971).

Thompson's definition of (African) aesthetics, on the other hand, rather stresses the aspect of form: 'African aesthetics is the application of consensual notions of quality to particular problems of form' (1971a: 374).<sup>2</sup> From his study of Yoruba aesthetics (see especially Thompson 1973), however, it is clear that he does not disregard the content to which the form may refer. Thompson's definition, with a certain emphasis on 'consensual' and 'form' (as regards 'form', see also below), reflects more or less the way in which, as can be inferred, aesthetics is implicitly defined by a large number of the researchers who empirically investigate African (see Van Damme 1987) and other non-Western aesthetics. The same can be said of Bohannan's definition of aesthetics. In an anthropological context, he says, aesthetics refers to 'the relationship between criticism and art objects', and can be defined as 'the study of relationships between art and all that bundle of attitudes and activities which we in the modern world call criticism' (Bohannan 1961: 86).

As regards the implicit definitions of aesthetics mentioned above, Goldwater (1973: 6) remarks: '[aesthetics] usually points to those aspects of art that are left after function, ritual or otherwise, iconography and meaning—if these indeed can be distinguished—are separated out'. He continues by saying that aesthetics 'is sometimes made to include skill or the self-consciousness (on the part of the artist), or the admiration (on the part of the audience) for skill, but only in so far as that skill is employed for the purposes of arrangement and design and not in so far as it is devoted to the accurate making of traditional forms' (ibid.). Aesthetics as used in most discussions of 'primitive' art, Goldwater concludes, may thus 'be said to apply to what in the discussion of our own art world would be called its "abstract" aspects, i.e. those having to do with the pleasing distribution of formal elements' (ibid.).

A lot of researchers indeed seem to implicitly define aesthetics as the study of what Goldwater calls 'the pleasing distribution of formal elements', hereby concentrating especially on the formal aspects of the plastic and graphic arts. In doing so, as Goldwater suggests as well, many students of aesthetics try to discover 'purely formal preferences', by which I mean that in such instances they are looking for evaluations of forms as such, stripped of their content and (other) associative values.

Although adding that they are not mutually exclusive, Thompson, for example, distinguishes between 'associate values', which can influence the evaluation of wood sculpture, and 'true aesthetic sensibilities', which are shown by the critics and which focus on the 'purely formal' aspects of sculpture

2. See also Borgatti (1976: 4): '*Aesthetics* refers to the system of rules, either explicit or inferred, by which formal arrangements in space and/or time are perceived and evaluated within a given society.'

(1973: 23). Although space does not allow me to elaborate on this important topic, it may be noted that such a distinction—mostly implicit and without clear boundaries—is made by many scholars, who thereby regard a judgement as ‘really aesthetic’ only if it refers solely to form (or colour) *per se*.

A second and contrasting tendency to be observed consists of studies that show interest precisely in the way preferences for certain formal characteristics are influenced by the associate values that are evoked by a form and/or by the content to which this form refers. A good example of this approach is a study by Vogel on the aesthetics of the Baule of the Côte d’Ivoire. Having referred to Cordwell, who wrote (1959: 45) that ‘aesthetic factors are so intermingled with the religious, economic, political, and social aspects of a culture...that the vocabulary concerning what is beautiful may refer primarily to qualities such as wealth or prestige value, religious or political symbolism’, Vogel (1980: 1) makes the following remark in her introduction: ‘in 1968 I read this as a warning of the pitfalls inherent in a study of formal aesthetic preferences. Today I am interested in the close examination of aesthetic preferences precisely because it can reveal much about religious, political, and social values.’

### *Aesthetics as Philosophy of Art*

As we have seen, in defining aesthetics both Stout and Lawal talk about the philosophy of the beautiful. In what in the Western tradition is known as aesthetics it is not unusual to enlarge this philosophy of the beautiful to include the philosophy of art. Here we want to ask the question whether or not this characterization of aesthetics as philosophy of art is found in the anthropological literature as well.

In reviewing anthropological writings on aesthetics it appears that Senghor is one of the few researchers who explicitly employs such a description. Senghor (1956: 53) talks about the ‘philosophical reflection on Art, by which Aesthetics is defined’.<sup>3</sup> Generally speaking, it is of course very difficult to delineate the field covered by aesthetics as defined as such. After all, both ‘art’ and ‘philosophy’ are terms that can be said to be surrounded by discussion and a certain degree of vagueness. Senghor, however, more or less clarifies his definition by adding that in Africa the study of aesthetics has to look for ‘the fundamental laws of Negro African art’ (ibid.: 43).<sup>4</sup> The problem remains as to what should be meant by ‘art’, both in Senghor’s definition and in others in which this term is used. The question of ‘art’, or more generally what could be

3. ‘...réflexion philosophique sur l’Art, par quoi se définit l’Esthétique.’

4. ‘...les lois fondamentales de l’art négro-africain.’

considered the object of aesthetic experience, cannot be fully pursued in this essay. In anticipation of at least some remarks on this topic, which will follow later on, suffice it to say that in principle no natural or cultural phenomenon should be precluded in advance.<sup>5</sup>

Matukanga, another African scholar writing in French, also appears to equate 'aesthetics' with 'the philosophy of art', for in an article entitled 'Philosophie de l'art en Afrique noire', he sets out to 'reflect on the Negro African aesthetic' (1977: 104).<sup>6</sup>

From the fact that under the heading of 'aesthetics' some students occasionally make remarks that might be considered 'art-philosophical',<sup>7</sup> it can be inferred that besides Senghor and Matukanga, other scholars too—albeit both implicitly and partially—follow the more or less established Western (philosophical) tradition of conceiving aesthetics as the philosophy of art.<sup>8</sup> By and large, however, such an interpretation of aesthetics is relatively rare in the anthropological literature.

### *Ethno-Aesthetics*

Another broad application of the notion at hand can be found in the use some authors make of the term 'ethno-aesthetics'.

In 1967, Gerbrands wrote: 'the term *ethno-aesthetic* was suggested to me in 1959 by the late Melville J. Herskovits, then Professor of Anthropology at Northwestern University, Evanston, Ill., after an exchange of letters over a period of some years about how to approach that special kind of art usually called "primitive"' (1967: 7). Dark, who appears to have discussed this matter with Gerbrands (Dark 1967: 132), similarly uses the term 'ethno-aesthetics' to refer to the cross-cultural study of art. The research into the aesthetic values underlying the production and evaluation of art is only one aspect of this kind

5. See, for example, Boas (1927: 9), and Stoller and Cauvel (1979: 95): 'We conceive of aesthetic values as potentially appearing in any nook or cranny of a culture.' Such an approach, they write, 'frees us to be receptive to the aesthetic values which may appear in rituals, storytelling, uses of space and time, and the practical daily activities of the people'.

6. '...réfléchir sur l'esthétique négro-Africaine.'

7. Two recent examples are Onyewuanyi (1984), who deals with the influence of African metaphysics on the interpretation of works of art in Africa, and Stéphan (1988) who, among other things, treats the question of whether certain forms of African art present (*présentification*) or represent (*représentation*) their subject.

8. On the problem of the distinction between philosophy of art and aesthetics, see also Nwodo 1984.

of study. Ethno-aesthetics may thus be considered that part of 'ethnoscience' that deals with art (Dark 1967: 132; 1978: 35-7).<sup>9</sup> Put this way (see also Gerbrands, as quoted above), ethno-aesthetics becomes almost a synonym for the anthropology of art, albeit that, with regard to methodology, the principles of one particular branch within anthropology—ethnoscience—are being followed.

Leuzinger, too, defines the term 'ethno-aesthetics' in such a broad way that one is inclined to think that we are dealing with a description of the anthropology of art, rather than the way aesthetics is conceived within an anthropological approach. According to Leuzinger (1978: 45), ethno-aesthetics has as its goal 'to come to grips with tribal art in the totality of its context and history, meaning and form, and the person and character of the individual creator'.<sup>10</sup> Similar broad definitions of ethno-aesthetics as referring to the general study of the (non-Western) arts 'from within' are given by Mead (1979: 8) and Delange who talks about "Ethnoaesthetics" or the sociology of art in preliterate civilizations'.<sup>11</sup>

Over the years, however, the term 'ethno-aesthetics' appears to have become more narrowly defined and, in accordance with the way the word 'aesthetics' is commonly used, has more and more come to refer to that part of the anthropological study of art (or a general ethnoscientific approach to art) that deals with 'emic' or indigenous aesthetic categories and principles (see Kaeppler 1979: 185; Flores 1985: 31-2; Schomburg-Scherff 1986: 28; Seymour-Smith 1986: 50; as well as Hatcher 1985: 246, who also mentions—as the second meaning of ethno-aesthetics—the general study of the [visual] arts of different [ethnic] cultures).

According to Stéphan, who seems to suggest (1979: 330) that the term was called into existence by Delange (which can be doubted), '*ethno-esthétique*' refers to both the traditional aesthetics of illiterate societies and the specialized study of them (1988: 279). As a study, he says, ethno-aesthetics may refer to different types of research. It may have as its object the particular aesthetics of one society, say, Yoruba aesthetics or Baule aesthetics (in this case the prefix ethno- could be said to stand for ethnography). On the other hand, Stéphan writes, ethno-aesthetics is also used to refer to the kind of comparative study that bases itself on the results of the different inquiries into these particular aesthetics (here ethno- can be considered short for ethnology). As an example he cites Vogel's (1979) comparison of Baule and Yoruba aesthetics. Such comparisons are made, so to speak, from the outside, but others, says Stéphan, can be carried out from within, by studying the way a given society evaluates

9. As regards ethnoscience, see, for example, Sturtevant 1964.

10. '...die Stammeskunst in ihrer Summe von Umwelt und Geschichte, Sinn und Form, Person und Charakter des individuellen Schöpfers zu erfassen.'

11. '“Ethnoesthétique” ou sociologie de l'art dans les civilisations sans écriture.'

the art of another society against the background of its own particular aesthetics. Stéphan does not provide an example of this kind of inquiry, but I could point here to a study by Silver (1983), who investigated the evaluations of the Asante people of Ghana of sculpture from other African ethnic groups, as well as from Oceania.<sup>12</sup> Stéphan proposes to call these last two types of research '*ethno-esthétique comparative*'<sup>13</sup> and to reserve the term '*ethno-esthétique*' for studies that limit themselves to an inquiry into one particular aesthetic.

### *Towards a Multimedia and Multisensorial Approach*

In general, such ethno-aesthetic studies have been restricted to research into the aesthetic principles underlying the production and evaluation of such static objects as anthropomorphic sculptures and ornamented utensils. This approach should be expanded to include the aesthetics of objects (most notably masks) and their accompanying art forms in time and space, as well as the aesthetics of events occurring in space and/or time without necessarily using objects (dance, music, oral literature etc.). A static, object-orientated approach to aesthetics, which may be considered a rather typical Western approach that is only partially applicable to, for example, African aesthetic reality (cf. Van Damme 1987: 67-8), would thus be avoided.

Even then, however, aesthetics would pertain particularly to perception through only two senses: those of the eye and the ear. At least if aesthetics were to remain true to its etymology as deriving from the Greek *aísthesis*, meaning sense-perception, thereby taking into account, at least in principle, *all* the senses (Liddell, Scott and Jones 1968: 42, s.v. *aísthánomai*, *aísthesis*), the sensations of smell, touch and taste should be considered too. As Berleant (1964) has noted, since classical Greek philosophy, followed by the Christian

12. See also Graburn (1978) who recorded the reactions of North Americans to an exhibition of commercial Inuit and Amerindian arts and crafts, and Delange-Fry (1979) who reports on a similar project carried out in Winnipeg, where questionnaires were handed out to visitors to an exhibition of African sculpture. Other examples are a study by Child and Siroto (1971) in which photographs of Kwele (of Congo and Gabon) masks are judged by art experts in New Haven, and Wolfe (1969) who asked Western Africanists to evaluate the degree of development of the plastic and graphic arts of several African peoples.

13. Normally this element of comparison is not part of the definition of ethno-aesthetics (which could perhaps be partly explained by the fact that only recently has enough empirical material become available to allow for comparisons to be made). It is, however, mentioned by Hatcher (1985: 246). I too have regarded the comparative aspect as part of ethno-aesthetics in general (1987: 8).

tradition, there has been a discrimination between the 'higher' senses (eye and ear) and the 'lower' senses (smell, touch and taste). The 'higher' senses are the 'distant' receptors that have been accredited high status because they are most closely related to the operations of reason or the meditative spirit. The 'lower' ones are the 'contact' senses that have been given low status because they are associated with practical, manipulative work and call attention to the body and sexuality. The largely unquestioned emphasis on visual and auditory perception in Western aesthetic theory may thus be shown to rest on a metaphysical and moral basis. Although it may safely be assumed that in human experience in general those of the eye and the ear are—none the less—the two most important senses,<sup>14</sup> it should be pointed out that this legacy of the Western mind-body dualism, mentioned by Berleant, should not hinder us in empirically studying non-Western (as well as Western!)<sup>15</sup> aesthetics by restricting a priori the field of inquiry to visual<sup>16</sup> and auditory perception. Indeed, it can be shown that other modes of sensorial perceiving should not be excluded in advance. In writing on Oriental aesthetics, Munro (1965: 44) remarks that, although the innate limitations of the lower senses in perceiving complex form are recognized by psychologists everywhere, this 'has not prevented Eastern art from endowing lower sense-qualities, such as those of perfume, with meanings which tend to dignify, refine, and incorporate them in the realm of fine art'. Elsewhere, I have referred to some examples indicating the importance of, particularly, tactile aesthetic experiences in Africa (Van Damme 1987: 68, 76 n. 51). I shall not repeat them here, but continue with an example from Oceania showing how different senses can be involved in perceiving aesthetically.

14. See, for example, Boone (1986: 133), who mentions that among the Mende (of Sierra Leone) 'elders explain that we live by the eye, and that sight is the sense that first draws our attention to a thing'. The Mende, furthermore, 'consider smell as the lowest of the senses and the closest to the animal' (ibid.: 172) (cf. Aristotle as discussed by Tatarkiewicz 1980: 314). It may be noted, however, that among the Luba of Zaïre the term *impe* can be applied in both a visual sense, as in *mukaji mwimpe*, 'a beautiful woman, attractive, nice' ('*une belle femme, attrayante, gentille*') and an olfactory sense, as in *mupaya mwimpe*, 'a pleasant smell coming from the kitchen' ('*une bonne odeur venant de la cuisine*') (Matukanga 1977: 107). Although caution is required, the semantic analysis of words pertaining to the several modes of perceiving may provide some clues as to the relationship and hierarchy of the different senses in a given culture.

15. Inspired by Boas, who already in 1927 suggested we should consider all the senses when dealing with aesthetics (1927: 9-10), Forrest, in an anthropological study of aesthetics in a white American community in North Carolina (1988), takes into account smell, touch and taste, as well as sight and hearing. See also Roudnitska's (1977) 'olfactory aesthetics' discussing Western perfumes.

16. As regards the emphasis on the eye in the Western philosophical and scientific tradition, and its consequences for anthropological inquiry, see also Carpenter (1969), who blames literacy, and Fabian (1983: ch. 4) on what he calls *visualism*.

As Steager (1979: 352) reports, the people of Puluwat, a small island in the central Carolines (Micronesia), seem 'to apply aesthetic criteria to the sound of the human body in motion, but only in the context of dancing'. The sound referred to here is made by the grass skirts, worn by the women, and the wreaths of coconut palm fronds, worn around the waist and on the upper arms and ankles by male dancers. The sounds made by these skirts and wreaths are regarded as very pleasing. In a similar vein, traditional jewellery appears to have been worn, by both men and women, not only for its attractive appearance, but also because of the pleasing sounds it produced when moving with the body. More importantly, Steager also mentions the lavish use that is made of flowers in everyday body adornment: 'although flowers are regarded as visually attractive, they may be worn as much for their aroma as for their appearance' (ibid.). Some flowers are even especially prized after they have wilted and turned black, because of the heavy sweet aroma these withered flowers emit. Western perfumes and sweet-smelling hair tonics are also used to enhance the body aroma. 'The smell of a person', Steager writes, 'is clearly the focus of aesthetic sensibilities. These interact with visual aesthetics in the use of flowers to create an aesthetic complex like that produced by the interaction of visual and auditory aesthetics in traditional jewelry' (ibid.).

Steager also seems to point, furthermore, to the importance of yet another way of sensorial perceiving among the Puluwatans, namely through tactile sensations—resulting from touching or being touched. Having noted that traditional tattooing appears to be disappearing, he mentions that he was told 'that women also tattoo the insides of their thighs and that these tattoos have great erotic significance' (ibid.). Besides some examples from Africa referred to above, I may also point here to Swinton (1978: 85-6) who attaches much importance to the sensation of touch in Inuit aesthetics.

While discussing African aesthetics, Ottenberg, in addition, points to the importance of 'the physical feel of movement—not quite the same thing as touch' (1971: 9). In general this 'kinaesthetic' feeling may be regarded as not only resulting from the movement of the body as, for example, in the experience of a dancer, but also from experiencing this 'muscular sensation' (Boas 1927: 10) vicariously as a spectator. As an example I may refer to Kaeppler's remarks (1971: 177, 182) on the way a Tongan onlooker may have an aesthetic experience through participating in a dance by empathy with the performers.

Another sort of what may be considered kinaesthetic experience is suggested by Pieper. In an anthropological study of Indian architecture, he writes (1980: 65) that 'in the context of urban architecture the term "haptic" denotes those spatial qualities which are experienced not by looking at the settlement structure, but by moving in and about it'. It is this 'haptic'<sup>17</sup> experience of urban space through body movement that 'evokes a sense of the "spirit of the

17. Remaining true to its etymology, the term 'haptic' (from the Greek verb *haptein*, 'to touch') is more commonly used as a synonym for 'tactile' (see, e.g., Haselberger 1961: 346).

place” and that decides our aesthetic judgement in architectural terms’ (ibid.: 65-6).

In suggesting a multisensorial approach to the art of Japanese gardens, Slawson (1987: 77) includes an observation comparable to Pieper’s. Although the garden is primarily a visual art form, he writes, ‘it can also directly engage our sense of hearing (a waterfall, leaves rustling in the wind) and our sense of smell (flagrant wisteria, pine needles)’. Further, the sense of touch, by which Slawson not only means the sensations received through the skin, but also the kinaesthetic sensations resulting from the interaction of muscle groups, ‘is directly addressed as one moves physically through a garden designed for strolling in’. Tactile sensations, however, are more often involved indirectly, ‘through visual clues such as those of texture, shape and line’. Be it even more indirectly, Slawson adds, the sense of taste is engaged as well, since certain gardens are spoken of ‘as having an “astringent” or “dry” flavor’.<sup>18</sup>

### *Concluding Remarks*

I shall not attempt to define aesthetics myself, since I feel that several other elements, which cannot be elaborated upon here, should be taken into account. In this respect, I may for example point to the influence of cognition, more particularly of knowledge of the culturally defined content and/or associated values, on the evaluation of what is being perceived. From the analysis given above, however, it is clear that to be applicable cross-culturally (not excluding Western society), aesthetics, as an empirical study, can no longer be regarded as pertaining to the study of the *visual* perception of the *beauty* of a material *object*. First, remaining faithful to its etymology, aesthetics should take into account not only the eye and the ear, but also the olfactory, tactile and gustatory experiences, and even the experience of movement, as well as possible combinations of the different senses in perceiving. Secondly, aesthetics has to deal not only with beauty or what comes close as an equivalent, but also with the perceptive experience of the ugly, the comic or other categories that in a given culture may be discerned as descriptions of what are deemed qualitatively different feelings resulting from perception. Thirdly, aesthetics should pay attention to the evaluations resulting not only from beholding static objects, but also from perceiving objects and events occurring in space and/or time.

Admittedly, studying different media as well as sensorial experiences other than those involving sight, will pose problems for Western anthropologists and art historians who are raised and trained in a visually and object orientated

18. Such a phenomenon will generally be considered a form of synesthesia, which refers ‘to the transfer of qualities from one sensory domain to another’ (Marks 1984: 427).

culture. With regard to the multimedia approach, a way out of this difficulty may be that researchers should seek the help of colleagues specializing in the anthropology of dance, music or oral literature.<sup>19</sup> With respect to the study of the role of the different senses in aesthetics, less visually biased non-Western researchers may lead the way.

19. In her study of the Okpella (of Nigeria) art of masquerade, Borgatti (1979), for example, calls in the assistance of Margaret Thompson Drewal (ethno-choreologist) and Allen Burns (ethno-musicologist).

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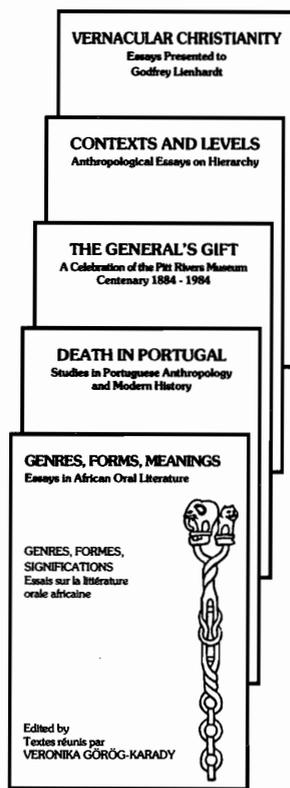
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## BOOK REVIEWS

CATHERINE A. LUTZ, *Unnatural Emotions: Everyday Sentiments on a Micronesian Atoll and their Challenge to Western Theory*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press 1988. xiv, 245 pp., References, Index, Plates. £27.95/£14.50.

Despite the long tradition that constitutes psychological anthropology, it is only comparatively recently that anthropology has begun to look at indigenous notions of psychological states, rather than continuing to put forward universalist explanations that rely entirely on Western categories. The present volume is very much concerned to get away from such categories in its delineation of the emotional states actually recognized by the Ifaluk, who inhabit an atoll in the Caroline Islands. But this is not just an ethnography, and the usual feeling that the anthropological endeavour should promote a degree of reflection on the values of the societies from which most anthropologists come is energetically carried out here through a continual process of comparison, bringing in both Western categories of emotion and Western academic discourse upon them.

In accordance with her persuasive arguments in favour of the cultural and variable, not universal and constant, character of views of what constitutes the emotions, Lutz stresses that Ifaluk see them as part of the process of social interaction rather than as inner states chiefly of significance to the individual, as in the West. Ifaluk assume 'that people are oriented primarily toward each other rather than toward an inner world of individually constituted goals and thoughts' (p. 81). No doubt this contrast comes from the general atomization of Western society, in which the individual has an autonomy often lacking in non-Western ones. From this it follows that differing concepts of personhood necessarily form a crucial element of the study. But further, Ifaluk emotionality is seen as having both cognitive and moral force in relationships with others, a view totally divorced from the Western view of emotion as a condition either enhancing or diminishing one's personality, as the case may be. Here, thought and feeling form a unity largely unknown in the positivist West, where fact is divided from value, and cognition divided at once from morality and emotion. Also, the importance of speech in Ifaluk means an emphasis on discourse and oral expression as marks of emotional maturity.

Lutz thus locates Western psychology too in its social and historical context. Despite a degree of sympathy for the psychodynamic approach of Melford Spiro, she distances herself from it on the grounds of his own use of Western psychological categories as universals. Rather, her work entails an ethnopsychological approach as regards both the West and the Ifaluk, thus concentrating on the cultural categorization of the emotions and leaving aside the whole thorny question of identifying the inner states actually being experienced by others. In any case, the contrasts that can be drawn between Ifaluk and Western ethnopsychologies do not appear to be limitless. For instance, one could imagine Lutz's suggestion that

'in many contexts, declarations of fear can be seen as attempts to negotiate the meaning of behaviour that has disturbed others' (p. 201) applying equally well to the West as to the Ifaluk. Indeed, she herself ends by suggesting that in reality Western emotionality also has a social dimension, despite the cultural focus on individual well-being, individual inadequacy, individual rights, and so forth.

Lutz is also interesting on the question of fieldwork, believing it should be an interaction between two cultures through the medium of the anthropologist, not a confrontation between a Western anthropologist and a non-Western society. None the less, her actual experience 'was profoundly affected by what the Ifaluk expected of me' (p. 33)—in particular, her own expectation that she would be treated as an honorary male anthropologist was not realized. Certainly there are gender contrasts in Ifaluk society, though the dominant values are not all on the one side, and the contrasts do not really appear to extend very far into Ifaluk emotional life.

A persuasive volume with regard to what it sets out to achieve, *Unnatural Emotions* should stand as an exemplar for any further studies into the culture of the emotions in non-Western societies, and as a warning against assuming too hastily that our essentially emic psychological categories are also theirs.

ROBERT PARKIN

MICHAEL F. BROWN, *Tsewa's Gift: Magic and Meaning in an Amazonian Society*, Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press 1986. 205 pp., Bibliography, Indexes, Plates. \$19.95.

Michael Brown's field research was conducted between 1976 and 1978 in several communities located in the valley of the Alto Rio Mayo, a tributary of the Huallaga River in northern Peru. *Tsewa's Gift* contains interesting descriptions of magical practices, but the importance of the book lies in the distinctiveness of the author's approach and the value of his presentation.

With an anti-theoretical advance into the everyday world of magic and meaning among the Aguaruna, Michael Brown unravels an heterogeneous array of extraordinary beliefs and practices. His ethnographic presentation deliberately threatens the ordered and systematized formulations of many anthropologists. He seems to be at pains to distance himself from the cultural relativism that so often results in a sense of complete internal cultural hegemony. He points more towards the question of a historically experiencing self, with all the conflicts and uncertainties that it involves, embracing such notions as the undecidability of the signifier, where 'immutable facts often prove illusory' (p. 172) and ineffable, not just to the anthropologist but also to the participants themselves: 'the search for order is being called into question... My goal is to make explicit the implicit

assumptions that underlie Aguarun magic while avoiding the temptation to explain too much or exaggerate the coherence of magical strategies' (p. 162). Anthropologists have too often overstated the rigidity of ritual causality. Brown attempts to show both that Aguarina magic has enough loose ends and ambiguities for everyone to be an 'intersubjective' reader and how their 'shared knowledge provides the mental forestructures that allow people to interpret experiences in ways that are distinctive' (p. 163).

Among the Aguaruna, the words of their mythical garden songs are indices of powerfully structured thoughts. The garden is a spiritually charged realm posing dangers to the unwary. It is the principal point of contact between women and an array of powerful beings, especially Nuguki who lives in the topsoil and gives life to cultivated plants. More than anything, a woman's interest in the garden, is a concern for the 'souls' of her plants. Plants are people, and like people can become very dangerous when angered. Plants are most dangerous during their early months. If they are unsatisfied, badly kept or abused they will relieve their insatiable thirst by 'drinking the blood' of those who wander through the garden unprotected. Blood is an abstract symbol of both vitality and women's fertility. Blood is the medium by which thought is conveyed in the body, and so, analogously, the 'blood' water, died red from achiote pulp, transfers the thoughts of the songs from the gardener to her plants, demonstrating the synergistic relationship between the plants and people.

Magical stones aid the productivity of the manioc plot. Like the manioc, they are potentially dangerous for they 'drink the blood' and 'eat the souls' of unprotected people who pass through the garden. It is important for a woman to identify herself as a friend by being painted, so when she plants a new section in her garden she crushes a pod of achiote and uses the red pulp to paint lines on her cheek-bones. The stones' dangerous thirst is satisfied by leaving them in a bowl of water reddened with achiote pulp. As well as drinking blood and eating souls, they assume human form in dreams and move by themselves as if alive. Women avoid newly planted gardens during menstrual periods because the smell of menstrual blood 'burns' the plants, turning them yellow and sickly. The system of taboos, planting rituals and songs protects the family from the perils of the garden.

In his portrayal of garden magic, Brown is extrapolating an argument about the embeddedness of magic within the technology and mechanics of gardening, and about magic being as much instrumental as expressive. Originally, he was involved with ethnobotanical research in Peru, and, as an 'on the ground' anthropologist with the reservations and limitations that seem to come along with being a 'biologist', he launches an attack on those anthropologists he calls 'symbolists', 'idealists' and those intellectuals in 'hermeneutico-psychedelic' waters. So although limited in analysis, *Tsewa's Gift* is a readable description of magical activities as 'practical signification'.

Brown attempts to reveal the disparities and variations that exist between different people's understandings and practices (as well as their similarities and

uniformities). He does not, however, probe deeply enough into local notions, language and ritual. Indeed, he is much too suspicious about the analysis of ritual and language, and thus limits himself at the outset. His concern is with magical activity as operational procedure. He shows a good understanding of the meaning of actions and reveals the power of song recitation. More than simply performance, the songs are constituted by an evocative imagery immersed in an ancient source of knowledge. People attribute to magic a strong but not infallible power of compulsion. Through Brown's presentation of Aguaruna beliefs we are shown how signification is the essence of technology, and more than anything, we are shown that no action, practical or otherwise, is free from the burden of signification—adapting Geertz's insight into the Negara, we realize that far from being opposed to it, the mechanics of power *is* its poetics.

GARETH BURR

DAVID M. GUSS, *To Weave and Sing: Art, Symbol, and Narrative in the South American Rain Forest*, Berkeley etc.: University of California Press 1990 [1989]. xiii, 246 pp., Bibliography, Index, Photographs, Map, Line Drawings. \$12.95.

The Yekuana of Southern Venezuela are among the better, perhaps the best, documented Carib-speaking peoples. The cosmic significance of the Yekuana's elaborately constructed round houses has long been appreciated, and this, after a preliminary general introduction, is the starting-point for Guss's own work. From here he moves on to the dual nature of reality, the geography of the person, and the techniques, in particular that of singing, whereby invisible forces are made safe for cultural purposes. While adding interesting detail, he offers little here that will not be familiar to most Amerindianists. It is in Chapter 4, when he turns his attention to baskets and weaving, that the book really takes off.

The Yekuana have long been famous for their basketwork, which is both beautifully made and decorated. Guss, however, goes far beyond such considerations in his exploration of basketry and argues that the study of this art form must include four interlinking features: narrative, graphic, technical and functional. The first concerns the stories the Yekuana have to tell about the baskets and their origins; the second concerns the nature of the designs that are woven into them; the third involves the actual making of the basket, including consideration of such aspects as types of material and the different weaving techniques; and the last involves the conditions, as well as the purposes, of use.

When all these aspects are taken into account, Guss argues, one can recognize replicated in the baskets the same configuration of cosmic symbols as, for example, one finds in the construction and layout of the round house. Indeed, Guss states "all things made" [including houses and baskets] are intended as

portraits of the society that inspired them' (p. 91). Houses and baskets are mutually reflexive, and just as the former is the created representation of Yekwana social and cultural existence, so too is the art of weaving an act of creation. This creativity reaches its supreme expression in the master basket-maker who, through his knowledge and skill, is able to resolve in the designs he weaves the dual nature of reality, thus making things whole; an ability he shares with the shaman.

It was through learning to weave that the author found himself in a position to participate in Yekwana life, and it was through this activity that he came to understand their culture. The argument is mainly plausible, and even if in places the imagination seems to outrun the evidence it does so in an intriguing and provocative manner that indicates further directions for investigation.

The book is clearly written and contains 50 plates depicting basketwork designs as well as other numerous illustrations. Publications on lowland South America often fail to attract as wide a readership as they deserve. It would be a pity if this book did not receive the attention of all anthropologists interested in art and material culture.

PETER RIVIÈRE

D. GEORGE SHERMAN (with the assistance of Hedy Bruyns Sherman), *Rice, Rupees, and Ritual: Economy and Society among the Samosir Batak of Sumatra*, Stanford: Stanford University Press 1990. xv, 366 pp., Plates, References, Index, Maps, Figures, Tables. \$42.00.

Samosir is a region in the highlands of north-central Sumatra comprising the west coast of Lake Toba and what is almost an island within that lake. The Samosir Batak make up part of the Toba Batak, about which there is an important literature, much of which is in Dutch. The Toba Batak are frequently referred to in comparative discussion of asymmetric marriage alliance and patrilineal descent. Students with no specialized interest in Southeast Asia may have come to know of them through Leach's detailed comparison of the Kachin and Batak in his essay on 'The Structural Implications of Matrilateral Cross-Cousin Marriage'.

This book focuses on their economy, and is concerned primarily with economic transformations during colonialism, particularly those associated with the introduction of exchange by currency. Reports from 1913 showed that trade took place then through barter, with rice as the medium of exchange. Dutch officials were unable to purchase goods with money. Today, however, only cash is accepted in the market-place. Money was certainly known before the Dutch arrived and it already figured in ceremonial transactions and as bridewealth.

Sherman shows that money did not simply replace barter, but eventually substituted for the previous medium of exchange. He concentrated his research on

rice production and the question as to whether the shift to cash and exposure to the capitalist profit motive brought increased individualism and the dissolution of Batak society. A good deal of the book is devoted to an argument with a few pages of Marshall Sahlins's essay on the sociology of primitive exchange (reproduced as Chapter 5 in *Stone Age Economics*) that discuss very tentatively Southeast Asian societies as exemplified by the Iban, Land Dayak and Lamet. Sherman also takes issue with other writers, such as J. H. Boeke on the implication of 'dual economy', and with Meillassoux's Marxist interpretation of the consequences of money substituting for goods in marriage transactions.

Among Sherman's arguments are the following. Feasting is not progressively redistributive but in fact represents a form of investment that may produce a profit for the feast giver, though it may also produce a loss. Commercialization of village agriculture is not necessarily detrimental to indigenous cultures. Rice is often borrowed and repaid, with and without interest. The social value, as opposed to the commercial exchange value, of rice is far more important in Batak society than in Sahlins's model. It may be impossible to refute the Marxist view that systems of beliefs and values amount to 'false consciousness', but Sherman nevertheless rejects it. Meillassoux is wrong to say that where money replaces local matrimonial goods women become equivalent to livestock. In spite of the overt changes in Batak life, there has been no disintegration of traditional social institutions. Long suppressed, feasting has again become common. The Batak are and have long been expert at cultivating land overgrown by swordgrass, despite the conventional view that this grass is impossible to eradicate. Labour has not been commoditized to a significant degree.

Like others who have worked in Indonesia, Sherman rejects Leach's view that societies with matrilineal cross-cousin marriage will necessarily be class stratified. He also rejects the view that such societies become stratified through the rise of cash economy. The uses and effects of money have been less than might be expected given its importance in market transactions, schooling and travel. Despite a moral imperative against converting down (trading prestige goods for subsistence goods), all kinds of conversions took place in pre-colonial society and the existence of differentiated exchange spheres depended on this convertibility. Feasting is a way of competing for *sahala*, soul force or power.

The book is original and stimulating, even if the theoretical literature it responds to often seems poorly conceived for Southeast Asian purposes. On the other hand, Sherman often neglects work on Indonesia directly related to his own arguments. More than one Indonesianist has taken issue with Leach concerning the relation between asymmetric marriage alliance and class stratification. Eastern Indonesianists have had a good deal to say about the relationship between external trade and the internal circulation of prestige goods related to marriage alliance, as well as about the restricted role of cash in partially monetarized economies. Finally, given his comments about comparing feasting with the potlatch and about the pursuit of *sahala*, one would have expected Sherman to have referred to F. D.

E. van Ossenbruggen's *Het Oeconomisch-Magisch Element in Tobasche Verwantschapsverhoudingen* (1935).

R. H. BARNES

OLAF F. SMEDAL, *Order and Difference: An Ethnographic Study of Orang Lom of Bangka, West Indonesia* [Oslo Occasional Papers in Social Anthropology, no. 19], Oslo: Department of Social Anthropology, University of Oslo (Akademika) 1989. x, 278 pp., References, Index, Maps, Tables, Figures. No price given.

The Lom are another mostly undocumented people who have attracted an ethnographer and, partly in consequence of that, acquired ethnic identity. Some 752 persons on the tin-bearing island of Bangka, off the coast of Sumatra, they sometimes describe themselves as non-Muslim Malays. The ethnonym 'Orang Lom' is locally glossed as 'persons who have not yet accepted religion'. Like other non-Muslim communities on the peripheries of the Malay world, the Lom are sensitive to Malay derogations and cautious about discussing their affairs with strangers.

Among their singular characteristics are prohibitions on the use of pen and paper and on the construction of schools and religious buildings. They are prohibited from planting coffee, from practising wet rice agriculture and from selling rice, timber and certain other products. They may not use umbrellas or wear shoes. Unlike neighbouring Malays, they may and do eat pork. They practice incision of the prepuce, but not circumcision, and they bury their dead with the head to the east. They further differ from other Malays in dialect, clothing and various aspects of economic activity. As opposed to the Chinese community, with which they generally get on well, they share a common sense of being Malay. Among their most unexpected notions is their conviction that the world was created and their customs given to them by Gajah Mada, who is otherwise known as the historical chief minister of the Javanese fourteenth-century empire of Majapahit.

Smedal finds little coherence in the means by which the Lom may be identified as a distinctive ethnic grouping, nor does he find much structure in their cosmology or social symbolism. Their future is under some threat from a modernizing national government that has little sympathy for economic and cultural eccentricity. Eight chapters include, in addition to the topics already mentioned, discussions of birth and mortuary practices, of the economy, of sexual prohibitions, and of affinity and consanguinity. The book is based on about fourteen months of research. Various of its analytic observations are subtle and plausible. Nevertheless, most of the marginalized or aboriginal groups in the Malay region present similar interpretative difficulties that have been discussed by

other authors. An attempt to situate the Lom more directly within these discussions would have been welcome.

R. H. BARNES

DAN ROSE, *Patterns of American Culture: Ethnography and Estrangement*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 1989. 117 pp., Index, Plates. £17.95.

Dan Rose's new book combines different genres of writing to discuss the varied but fashionably related themes of poetics, ethnographic practice, alienation and cultural criticism. For the most part, the use of these genres gives the book a high degree of sensitivity, but its strength resides in the rich insights and suggestiveness of its ethnography. By the same token, the book is at first most frustrating when it digresses from interpretative ethnography at the expense of providing clear definitions of central terms such as 'colonisation' and 're-configuration'. More seriously, Rose refrains from providing the comprehensive and holistic picture of contemporary American society for which his extensive fieldwork and interpretative acumen seem to make him uniquely qualified.

The book's central theme is that America was fashioned out of the private chartered companies first established by the British to exploit the newly discovered land and its natural resources. Such corporations pioneered a hierarchical and managerial society motivated by profit and laid the foundations for contemporary institutions. Rose contends that the early crown charters provided the basis for the American constitution, while representative government was established as a managerial task. The impetus to colonization survived independence and continued in a restless cycle of re-configuring previous patterns and trends on the landscape. Rose refers to this as re-colonization and regards it as a fundamental activity of the modern corporations that exercise hegemony over public values and the American landscape. The country, he argues, is made up of triads: the three branches of government (executive, legislative, and judiciary); three levels of public administration (federal, state, local) and the three corporate sectors (public, private, non-profit). The private corporation provides the model for the public and non-profit organizations. The corporations integrate large sectors of individuals into a society. Individuals hold multiple corporate memberships that, taken together, define life-styles and values and take the place reserved in other societies for kinship, i.e. for establishing primary social experiences.

Not all citizens are incorporated into this complex enterprise. Many remain outside. Drawing on earlier fieldwork amongst Black Americans in Philadelphia, Rose argues that an underground, pre-capitalist economy exists in Black urban life that provides an instant if unequal credit system forming the basis of interactive

networks and establishing a source of 'communitas' outside the world of monopoly capital. Such an organization defines its own values, which are monitored and policed by interested parties in face-to-face contact—the absence of any third or disinterested intermediary party often leading to violence.

I have dwelt on the ethnography (and, it might be said, its implicit cultural criticism) to the exclusion of other issues, because of a personal puzzle and the contending and paradoxical feelings of estrangement and attraction that I experienced during a sabbatical leave in Washington, D.C. Time and time again I wondered about the relationship between the successful production and reproduction of a common national ideological position amongst a culturally disparate population—which in my neighbourhood was made up of Salvadorans, Whites and Blacks, who either ignored dominant organizations and values or who sought to construct an alternative history, each claiming their ancestral society as the fountainhead of a civilization that had been appropriated and distorted by the West. In this way, they sought not only to domesticate history and reverse their unsympathetic representation by and in it, but also to sculpture a sometimes superior identity. It is dangerous and politically conservative to overemphasize the autonomy of any subordinate sector of a society from the dominant institutions and sector that arch over it, but *Patterns of American Culture* offers very engaging and provocative insights into the puzzle of what keeps America together as a nation.

ANTHONY SHELTON

SERGEI KAN, *Symbolic Immortality: The Tlingit Potlatch of the Nineteenth Century*, Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press 1989. xvi, 353 pp., Glossary, References, Index, Plates. \$32.50.

Kan's work is concerned primarily with reconstructing the traditional mortuary practices of the Tlingit of southeastern Alaska. To achieve this he draws on ethnohistorical materials, including previously neglected Russian-language sources detailing early contact by both missionaries and explorers. This diachronic approach is complemented by his own ethnographic researches among the Tlingit, conducted mainly in the 1980s. Affirming Mauss's description of the potlatch as a 'total social phenomenon', Kan is concerned to bring out all its aspects in his account, refusing to reduce it to either a solely religious or solely political activity. Doctrinal use of anthropological theories—functionalist, structuralist, Marxist or whatever—is rejected in favour of descriptive ethnography and awareness of the 'texture of native experience' (p. 7).

Outlining a symbolic approach (on the basis that the ritual activity in question is the central ceremonial system of the culture), Kan moves on to draw out of the data indigenous notions of personhood, both in themselves and in relation to the

social order as a whole. This leads to an analysis of the root of the concept of *shagoon* (which, depending on context, may refer to, among other things, an individual's or matrilineal group's ancestors, heritage, the clan crest, destiny, the totemic animal and even an abstract supreme being) that is similar to the Nuer *kwoth* in that its plural meaning encompasses the spiritual life.

As to theory the book is modest, the author preferring to pen an exemplary study of mortuary rites and of the potlatch in its various religious, political and emotional aspects, rather than admonish reductionism by extensive argument. His comparativism is likewise cautious, moving slowly and surely through regionalism toward the wider vistas of circumpacific analogies. The local comparison is with the western subarctic Athapaskans (Katchin, Koyukon etc.) and with the neighbouring peoples of the Northwest Coast (Tsimshian and Haida). Similarities between aspects of Tlingit society and those of the simpler northern groups are explained by a Proto-Athapaskan base, common to both, to which the archaic stratum of the Tlingit mortuary complex belongs (cremation and the organization of society along moiety lines being cited as examples). This set of earlier practices is overlaid by 'classic' Northwest Coast cultural features—lavish gift exchange, complex ranking and property rights.

Concerning Oceanic and wider parallels, Kan suspends judgement on the grounds that the literature on death in Indonesia, Melanesia and Madagascar is too often of the either/or type (i.e. emphasizing either religion or politics) and that more data is required. Whether or not the time is right for such widespread comparativism, we cannot expect Kan to develop his monograph too far toward such an enterprise since its Tlingit focus does not allow it. Although he takes issue with his theoretical sources (Hertz, Mauss, Bloch and Parry) on specific points, his work affirms rather than denies their main insights.

Overall, the work should be seen as contributing to the general theory of the anthropology of death only in its critique of reductionism. Its strength lies in its subtle combination of the historical and ethnographic in a single text. For the regionalist, it provides stimulating discussions on the use of the terms 'class', 'caste', 'status' and 'rank' in the Northwest Coast context, as well as reconciling the sociological view of orchestrated mourning with genuine individual expressions of grief. Kan's book provides a rich, detailed and unusually sensitive account of the Tlingit mortuary complex and thus must be an essential text for those prepared to take up the challenge of wider comparisons.

RICHARD RUDGLEY

MARY TAYLOR HUBER, *The Bishops' Progress: A Historical Ethnography of Catholic Missionary Experience on the Sepik Frontier*, Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press 1988. xii, 264 pp., Bibliography, Index. \$29.95.

Early anthropologists, certainly up to the time of the Second World War and perhaps for two or three decades after it, tended to exclude missionaries from their concerns. Those bearers of an alien religion and culture intruded into 'sacred' territory and helped to destroy the pristine state of preliterate peoples. For various reasons, one of which is the shortage of tribes as yet unstudied, anthropologists have now changed course and are busily examining the work of missionaries, along with that of administrators, traders, and other groups of 'colonizers', as well as visitors and tourists.

Despite its rather odd title, *The Bishops' Progress* is a straightforward historical account, sprinkled with some sociological apperceptions, of the development of Catholic missionary work in Papua New Guinea. To use her own words, Mary Huber approached her task as a 'generalized American mainstream Protestant' who undertook the necessary fieldwork between 1976 and 1977, although she had been in the area before. She concentrated on the East Sepik province, and particularly on the town of Wewak, which was the missionary centre.

Papua New Guinea, once a German colony, has become a fertile ground for missionaries of all denominations. In 1966, 76 per cent of the population of the East Sepik region were Roman Catholic. The main thrust of the Catholic activity came with the arrival of members of the Society of the Divine Word (SVD). The order emerged from a missionary seminary in Germany in the late nineteenth century. Its headquarters were established in Holland. One of its members was the learned Pater Wilhelm Schmidt, who helped to edit *Anthropos*, the journal founded by the order. The SVD fathers pioneered missionary work based on anthropology. They also gathered around them large numbers of lay brothers who were skilled craftsmen. One result of this was that when mission work began in the Sepik in 1896, the order 'went into industry', developed sites, put up buildings, supplied the area with timber and created plantations.

Chapters are devoted to the historical stages through which the mission has passed. They begin with the economic success from the early days until the First World War. Papua New Guinea was then taken over from Germany by the Australian government who ruled the country until the Japanese invasion. In the early part of the interwar period German nationals were repatriated, although in the mid-1930s three-quarters of the mission staff were German. During the Japanese invasion many acts of cruelty were inflicted on the locals and expatriates. Cargo cults appeared in the 1930s in the form of the Mambu movement and the Four Black Kings. They were studied by the ethnologist and SVD priest Georg Hôltker. The mission preached against cults without much success, and the government removed the leaders when their followers refused to pay taxes. Needless to say, the public blamed the missionaries for the outbursts.

After the war, missionaries faced not so much political as ecclesiastical problems. These were centred on having to deal with the reforms that stemmed from Vatican II, coupled with the decline in European missionaries. The changes demanded by Rome met with opposition from some clergy as well as native Catholics. There was the demand for indigenization, by adopting some of the components of local culture—a *volte face* from an earlier policy when locals had been told to sever themselves completely from their culture. Bishops now appear in feathered mitres and vestments of local design. The call for localization meant the replacement of European manpower with local manpower. The attempt to recruit men to priestly and lay work, and also women to be sisters, has not been as successful as had been hoped. In 1976, there were 227 diocesan personnel, 40 per cent of whom were SVD brothers and sisters: 10 per cent were locals.

One would have liked to see the author pay more attention to fieldwork amongst local Catholics. At no stage was one 'introduced to the people': they seemed scarcely to exist. Mary Huber relied almost entirely on written sources, which meant that her work concentrated on church leaders, their policy, their organization, and the difficulties they faced. In short, we learn about some aspects of the bureaucratic structure. Also, relatively few theoretical issues, anthropological or theological, are raised. Even at the level of leadership there is little about the tensions of enculturation and the fear of syncretism.

An interesting but not compelling book.

W. S. F. PICKERING

*Visual Anthropology*, Vol. III, nos. 2-3 (1990) (Special Issue: *Picturing Cultures: Historical Photographs in Anthropological Inquiry*; ed. Joanna Cohan Scherer), 235 pp., Illustrations. No price given.

Anthropologists display a growing awareness of the usefulness of analysing both historical and contemporary photographs. It is, indeed, one of the sub-specialisms attracting an increasing amount of academic interest from anthropologists and historians. The present volume is a special edition of the quarterly journal *Visual Anthropology*, repackaged as a book, and considers the study, use and production of anthropological and ethnographical films, videos and photographs. It aims specifically at analysing historical ethnographic photographs through a variety of research methods. There are three separate sections entitled: 'In Search of the Image', 'In Search of the Image-Maker' and 'The Image as Anthropological Document'. The first section deals with three photographic collections and is the most purely descriptive in style, the second concentrates on two specific photographers, and the third interprets photographs in their historical and intellectual context.

The descriptive essays dealing with the photographic collections at the National Anthropological Archive, Washington, the Hungarian Ethnological Museum, Budapest, and the Tuscan Photographic Archives, Florence are only likely to be of interest to those working specifically in these geographical areas. However, the first essay does make some general points on the collecting policy of the museum.

The same is likely to be true of the essays reviewing the work of two photographers of American Indians, James Moody and Joseph K. Dixon. These take into account such historical aspects as the perceived need to photograph the 'vanishing race' and the practical difficulties of photography in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and whilst they might be seen as case-studies, the development of broader theoretical issues, only hinted at here, is missing.

The analytical essays in the third section are more likely to interest the majority of readers. Elizabeth Edwards' essay, 'Photographic Types: The Pursuit of Method', analyses the physical 'type' photography of the 1860s and 1870s, the main purpose of which was to illustrate the characteristics of racial groups. She reviews in detail two specific collections, the Berlin Project and Professor Huxley's project in Britain. Another useful essay in this section, by Christopher Pinney, analyses classification and fantasy in the photographic construction of caste and tribe in India, tying it to wider representational modes. The final essay in this section is an interpretation by Christraud Geary of ethnographic photographs from the Cameroons. These essays are good examples of the kind of detailed analysis that can be carried out on historical, ethnographic photographs and which breathes life into moribund and derided spheres of historical anthropological investigation.

The penultimate essay, by Flora S. Kaplan is entitled 'Some Uses of Photography in Recovering Cultural History at the Royal Court of Benin, Nigeria'. It shows one way in which contemporary and historical photographs can be used by the anthropologist in the field.

In their various ways, the essays make a contribution to the changing view of images as a source of anthropological information complementary to traditional forms. The collection does not make a consistent book, however, and shows very clearly its origins as an issue of a journal. The presentation and style of the essays vary very greatly and it is unlikely that any reader will find every essay of equal value and interest. Like many collections of essays it is a lucky dip aimed at every reader in general and none specifically; each reader has a chance, however, of finding something of interest. Whilst this is a volume that should certainly have a place in anthropological libraries, there may not be a place for it on every anthropologist's book-shelf.

ALISON PETCH

## EXHIBITION REVIEW

*Wamo, D'Entrecasteaux Islands, New Guinea: Photographs by Diamond Jenness, 1911-1912*, Oxford: Pitt Rivers Museum, 1 June 1991–23 May 1992.

This is something of a model exhibition. It includes sixty of the pictures taken by Diamond Jenness, better known for his work in the Arctic, but whose apprentice field experience was in the D'Entrecasteaux Islands three years before Malinowski's Trobriand work. The photographs are displayed alongside a selection of items collected by Jenness and some of the bureaucratic apparatus necessary to get him equipped in the field: correspondence from his supervisor Marrett regarding funding and a phonograph sold Jenness by Mrs James Frazer. The recordings made subsequently by Jenness feature as an exhibition soundtrack, and some technical details concerning the photographic materials he employed are also provided. The whole is then further contextualized by pictures taken by Michael Young who, as part of his own long-term fieldwork in the area, has recently taken photographs back to the islands as part of a collaborative exercise in building a visual history. With great economy the exhibition thus brings to light the neglected resource of Jenness's photographs, sketches the circumstances and technologies of their production, and re-engages with their subjects.

The photographs themselves include village views, portraits, groups, material culture and mission scenes (Jenness's entrée to the islands was through his Methodist missionary brother-in-law, the Revd A. Ballantyne). In addition, the pictures show harvesting and food preparation—though the islands, in which food is of momentous symbolic importance, were in the throes of a famine during the period of Jenness's stay. Photographically, the pictures are remarkable: sharp, full of detail even in the shadows, with subjects often unobtrusively arrested in mid-action. (Oddly, a recent article in *JASO* (Terence Wright, 'The Fieldwork Photographs of Jenness and Malinowski and the Beginnings of Modern Anthropology', Vol. XXII, no. 1, pp. 41-58) refers to Jenness's photographs as 'dull and uninspired' and treats him as purely a photographer in the physical specimens mode.) Technically, Jenness's pictures *are* in one way depressing, illustrating as they do the durability and capacity for enlargement that early black-and-white photographs possess, in comparison to the easy seduction of colour most often used by more recent generations of anthropologists.

Jenness later wrote to Marrett of his dissatisfaction with this early fieldwork, of the 'hundreds and thousands of interesting things I saw everyday...not recorded'. Perhaps; but his photographs mean that they were not entirely missed; nor should this exhibition.

MICHAEL O'HANLON

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## OBITUARY

ANDREW DUFF-COOPER

23 December 1947–4 August 1991

WHETHER Andrew Duff-Cooper would have wanted an obituary, any more than he wanted a funeral, is disputed, but his response to a notice of this kind would surely have been complex. He might have expostulated at the etymological implication, on the ground that he was certain he was descending nowhere, and he would have found it diverting that the derivation of the English verb 'to die' is unresolved and that by one hypothesis the original OE word itself died. What is sure is that he felt no disquiet at the imminence of his death, any more than he had any regret for the life that had conduced to it. He declared not long before, and with patent sincerity, that if he had foreseen the known outcome of the kind of life he had led he would have behaved in no other way. He did care, however, about dying while he still had so much to do and with profound problems unsettled. On a professional score this was indeed lamentable, and his death is a singular loss to scholarship as well as to his friends and colleagues.

Duff-Cooper came into social anthropology at Oxford later than the usual graduate and by a divagatious route. He was born in 1947, in Hampshire, and on leaving public school did not go to university but worked in a London insurance office. This lasted only a year, before he went to live in France and Spain, studying the languages, for the next two years. After that he again worked for a year in an office, this time in real estate in Geneva. In 1972 he returned to England, entered the College of Law, London, and passed Part I of the solicitors' qualifying examination. Then, the turning-point in his professional life, he entered the University of Kent in 1973, at the age of twenty-six, to read first law and then

sociology and philosophy; he graduated in 1976. The impression he had made at Canterbury gained him entry to the University of Oxford, where he was accepted by the Institute of Social Anthropology and awarded a four-year post-graduate scholarship by the then Social Science Research Council. It was especially valuable to him that, at the instance of his supervisor, he became a member of Merton College, and with that privilege, as he rightly saw it, his new life of steady dedication to research began. He was delighted by his college, and he responded to the ambience and resources of Oxford with a romantic enthusiasm. Termly reports by his supervisor testified to his quick intelligence, application, and originality. After the Diploma (since restyled M.St.) in Social Anthropology, he undertook for the first research degree (B.Litt., since M.Litt.) the editing of an unpublished book on totemism by Andrew Lang, together with a critical commentary and an account of the book's place in the history of ideas. In just one year he transcribed and established the text, in a volume of 435 pages, accompanied by another volume of editorial matter of comparable length. The succeeding year (1978-79) was spent at the University of Leiden in preparation for field research in Indonesia; and between 1979 and 1981 he studied, by a bold choice, Balinese living not on Bali itself but on the neighbouring island of Lombok.

The twenty-one months that he spent in Pagutan seem to have been the acme of his life. He responded with justified romanticism to the Balinese and to their ordered way of life, he submitted himself as a novice to a revered priest, and he formed a close friendship among Balinese youth. Lack of money brought him back to Europe sooner than he had wished, in 1981. He spent a year at Oxford (as a University of Oxford Bagby Scholar and with a grant from the Radcliffe-Brown Memorial Fund), and the next at the University of Leiden (with a Netherlands Government scholarship) under the direction of Professor de Josselin de Jong. In 1983 he passed the Oxford D.Phil. examination with a thesis on the collective ideas of a community of Balinese on Lombok, but, in the increasingly straitened circumstances of the universities, he could find no academic employment until 1985, when, at the initiative of Professor Teigo Yoshida, he was awarded a fellowship from the Japan Foundation, combined with a visiting lecturership at Keio University. This opportunity made for another ardent commitment. He was fascinated by Japan, and he found a sympathetic reception that culminated in another close and enduring friendship. Professionally, too, he gained a new security, with an assistant professorship at Seitoku Gakuen College in 1987, followed by a professorship at Seitoku University in 1990. Apart from the tenure of a Cosmos senior research fellowship at the University of Edinburgh (in the academic year 1989-90), and trips abroad to conferences, he resided in Japan almost until his death, and he intended to return there after a vacation in America and the U.K. in July and August 1991. At the end of July, while on the east coast of the U.S., he suffered a grave decline in a long-standing physical debility and flew at once to London, entering the Westminster Hospital. An abrupt collapse led

to his death, from amoebic dysentery, at the age of forty-three, on Sunday, 4 August 1991.

This calamity terminated a scholarly career of outstanding productivity and promise. In the seven years since 1983 Duff-Cooper had put into print 61 publications, most of these being long and intricate analyses; at the time of his death, a further nine had been announced as forthcoming. Most of the articles are concerned with Balinese metaphysics and cosmology, within the frame of their way of life, and several have to do with Japan. What is characteristic of them is their depth of analysis and, concomitantly, a theoretical generality that makes them intellectually suggestive beyond their ethnographic pertinence. Duff-Cooper had only to be struck by an analytical concept or operation, and very quickly he would apply it to ethnographic evidences, Balinese in the first place, and systematically work out its full application in that context. This is most readily seen in his essays focusing on duality, symmetry, asymmetry, reflexivity, reversal, and similarly abstract themes. If he encountered no more than an epigraph taken from a source with which he was not familiar, such as Plotinus or Weyl, he would straightaway follow it up and extract from the original a new application to his Balinese findings, intended usually to make a theoretical point such as could be applied to social facts more generally. Such a description of his manner of work may make it seem that he was doing no more than social anthropology, or comparativism, is meant to do. This is correct enough, but the essential point is that Duff-Cooper actually did it, with unremitting scholarly diligence, imaginative analysis, and rapidity of execution throughout a long series of publications.

His writings have a tone that is distinctive in both thought and style. The argument advanced is usually demanding, if only because he was never trivial and would see in the most minor phenomena (e.g. beetle-matches on Bali) aspects that were major and even universal. Sometimes the train of exposition is hard to follow, even tortuous. For the most part this is because the subject-matter calls for intense thought, to the point sometimes (as for instance with the concept of degrees of asymmetry) of appearing intractable. To some extent, especially in the earlier publications, the difficulty is also a matter of prose style. Duff-Cooper admired Hocart, but for some time he could not (or at any rate did not) write as directly as Hocart did. His prose could be toilsome and even ornate, highlighted by personal phrases that some readers might have thought dispensable. He found a quasi-technical satisfaction in a proliferation of footnotes, many of which had not their ordinary ancillary function but were instead intimations of his irrepressible inquisitiveness at the peripheries of his topic. Such features could impart a rather self-conscious air to what he wrote, and indeed his essays were contrived, but in the best of senses; that is, they were devised with skill in order to convey a case with due art and impact. Successively, moreover, his publications tended to become plainer, not as a concession to the captious (which he would have despised to make) but as a result of deliberate discipline. A recent example, and one all the more effective by reason of its intricacy, is his article 'Sculpturing Balinese Ideology' (*JASO*, Vol. XXI, no. 3) which formulates profound considerations about

representation. It is systematic, cogently constructed, and scintillates with ingenuity, yet the exposition is direct and, taken with due attentiveness, readily comprehensible.

It would not be simple, in the suddenness of this occasion and with regard to an abbreviated career, to evaluate as a whole the contributions made by Duff-Cooper's work. His ethnography of Balinese culture, and of Japanese, is persuasive and instructive but must be left to the assessment of experts. The resort to certain formal concepts is admirable and illuminating; the analyses show how a scholarly and highly intelligent mind can discern deep modes of order in exotic evidences, and at the same time they can be seen as validating basic predicates of ideology and of interpretation. These were Duff-Cooper's aims, and they make his writings an unusual source of theoretical inspiration.

The personality behind this endeavour was yet more profound but left a medley of strong impressions not always consonant with the seriousness and discipline of the anthropological work. Duff-Cooper was of average stature and quite lightly built, with close-cropped hair, old-fashioned spectacles, and dark, almost Levantine, eyes glinting with cleverness and satirical appraisal. His manner was alert and often intense, marked by passages of temperamental fervour; his good humour and sense of the ridiculous could be broken by passionate protest, and conversation in his company was seldom less than lively. He had something of a taste for the untoward, and at the same time an excitable commitment to matters of principle. His sense of occasion was proper, yet neither in garb nor in bearing did he always fit the conventions of the event itself. Often one sensed a mocking distance, as when he would turn up dressed as a very pukka solicitor, with hard white collar, but wearing bovver boots. In the King's Arms, while discoursing in his clearly modulated voice on some recondite author or obscure point of argument, he would be rolling his own fags. No wonder he was so content to be at Oxford: it was just the place for him, and he would have been pleased that a colleague should think so. Whether Oxford requited his devotion, short of an obituary, is a question that he would have recognized as inappropriate to the place. One would give much, as so often now, to have his amused response to the judgement that his death is a hard misfortune for an intellectual tradition of which his work is a praiseworthy expression.

RODNEY NEEDHAM

A review by Andrew Duff-Cooper appears below (pp. 272-5)

## WHIG ETHNOLOGY FROM LOCKE TO MORGAN

THOMAS R. TRAUTMANN

I come to the notion of whig ethnology through further reflection on the life and writings of Lewis H. Morgan. The central project of Morgan's life emanated from his astonished discovery of the profound differences between the Iroquois kinship system and his own. I continue to believe that the great comparative study through which he sought to illuminate that difference, *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity* (1871), is a work of rare originality, even of genius, that played a decisive role in consolidating anthropology by defining, indeed inventing, kinship as an object of study. It is one of the few works of nineteenth-century anthropology that remains a living text—his *League of the Iroquois* (1851) is another—and it still has much to teach us.

The special quality of Morgan, as it seems to me, is that the originality of that work is contained within a life and body of writings many aspects of which appear

I am grateful to Marcella H. Choy and N. J. Allen for their most helpful comments on an early draft, and to colleagues at the Oxford Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology (ISCA) for assistance of various kinds during my year as Visiting Fellow. This essay grows out of ideas first aired in a seminar I gave in El Colegio de Mexico in June 1989 called 'Anthropology among the Anglo-Saxons'. It acquired its present form as a paper given at the ISCA departmental seminar on Friday 26 October, 1990. Subsequent versions were delivered at the departments of social anthropology at The Queen's University Belfast, the London School of Economics and the University of Cambridge. I should like to thank David Lorenzen, Peter Rivière, Peter Parkes, Jonathan Parry and Keith Hopkins for their suggestions and criticisms, and the University of Michigan and the Faculty Development Fund of the College of Literature, Science and the Arts for support.

conventionally Victorian. In a number of respects, Morgan seems to us a representative type of his age, resolvable into his historical and cultural milieu. There is his lifelong adherence to the Presbyterian church; his attachment to the Whig, and then to the Republican, parties; his strong opposition to slavery (believing it repugnant to the Anglo-Saxon love of liberty); his conviction that Americans were more Anglo-Saxon than the British, being classless and republican; his belief that American capitalism would avoid hereditary privilege and class warfare through open access to economic advancement; and his progressive evolutionism. There is also the fact, the significance of which I wished to know, that Morgan possessed two copies of Locke's *Essay on Human Understanding*, one of them inherited from his father.<sup>1</sup> It is not my contention that all of Morgan's accomplishments can be attributed to his context; but much can be known about him through it, and I did not feel that I knew that context more than a few metres below the surface level of cliché. 'Whig ethnology' is a concept by which I hope to integrate the significant aspects of this context in its historical depth.

One of the problems with the concept of whig ethnology is that anthropologists have no idea what I have in mind, so that as a title it is certain to be a dead loss. Historians to whom I have mentioned the idea, on the other hand, catch on right away. This is because they have been obliged to read Herbert Butterfield's book, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (1965, first published 1931), or have at least learned by example to use the slogan to which the burden of the book has been reduced in intramural warfare.

Whiggish history really has two distinct but related meanings. In the first place it is the kind of history writing that was the dominant mode in nineteenth-century Britain and America. It is characterized by a whig or liberal outlook of a reforming kind and a cheerful optimism, sustained by a belief that history is guided by a law of progress; it is highly given to moralizing and is distinctly Protestant. It is one of the disappointments of Butterfield's book that he largely assumes we know what he is talking about and does not explicate the whig interpretation of history as an expression of Anglo-American Protestant culture. Other writers have made good the lack, most notably J. W. Burrow (1981). From him we learn that the defining type whom Butterfield does not name is almost

1. On Morgan's life generally, see Trautmann 1987. The defence of American capitalism occurs in his *Diffusion Against Centralization* (1852). Morgan's library was bequeathed to the University of Rochester, and his inventory of it (which Karl Kabelac and I are preparing for publication), in which the two copies of Locke are mentioned, is in the Morgan Papers there. Morgan is made more interesting for us by the ways in which he departs from the Victorian type. Thus, although he was a churchgoer and supporter of the Presbyterian church throughout his life, he did not formally become a member because of his inability to profess Christ. Again, though he defended American capitalism in his early life, toward the end of it he declared, at the close of *Ancient Society* (1877: 552), that a mere property career is not the final end of man, and that the future would see the revival, in a higher form, of the liberty, equality and fraternity of the ancient system of clans exemplified by the Iroquois.

certainly Thomas Babbington Macaulay, whose belief in progress was so robust that he beheld the English scene made beautiful by industrialization: 'seaside boarding-houses and rumbling factories embellishing landscapes once squalid with timber and thatch' (ibid.: 48). That kind of thing.

Whiggish history tends to divide the actors of the historical drama into the good guys who are fighting for the future and the bad guys who are reactionary obstacles to progress. It is this feature that leads to the second meaning of whig history, the one on which Butterfield dwells. Abstracting its formal characteristics from its specific cultural matrix, Butterfield constructs whiggish history as a structural type of history writing in order to attack it. The leading characteristic of this type is its presentism, its telling the story of the past from the point of view of the values of the present. Butterfield's work is a polemic against this kind of moralizing history, in favour of specialist research that does not pass moral judgements, a depoliticized technician's history, a history of 'is' and not of 'ought'. Whiggism in this second sense is a word of reproach; if you want to insult a historian, call him or her 'whiggish' and see what kind of reaction you provoke.

I confess I do not find Butterfield very convincing in his main argument, namely that history should be a charmed circle of understanding within which all sins are forgiven. The attempt to expunge moral reasoning from history, or from the human sciences in general, in order to make them scientific seems to me futile; but that is another story. What is much more interesting to me is the whig interpretation as a specific cultural form, the story that Butterfield takes for granted and declines to analyse more deeply.

Now, the whig interpretation of history is a reading of British and American history under the idea of a law of progress, involving the story of liberty, the story of knowledge and the story of property. It is also an interpretation of the history of European civilization in general, more especially the march of progress from the Reformation to the present. I believe the 'whig interpretation of history' in its culturally and historically specific sense is a good and useful concept, and that it is good and useful to extend it to whiggish ideas of non-European nations and their relation to European civilization. This whig interpretation of the non-Western world I want to call 'whig ethnology'.

### *Whig Ethnology*

The story of whig ethnology has its own time frame, coming to a culmination in the 1870s, when anthropology came into existence as a specialist discourse with its own subject-matter and its own technical means of investigating it. The age of Tylor, Maine, McLennan, Lubbock and Morgan was when the whig interpretation of history was at its height, and the social evolutionism of these thinkers is clearly

an extension to the whole of human history of the whig interpretation of European history. We can see the Anglo-American anthropology of the late nineteenth century as a kind of secularization of whig ethnology, and whig ethnology as the immediate ancestor of the British and American national traditions of the anthropological discipline.

Starting-points can be decisive. Evans-Pritchard (1981), for whom the French tradition is very important, commences his history of anthropological thought with Montesquieu. The latter's *L'Esprit des lois* was of immense importance in Britain, especially for the writers of the Scottish Enlightenment, and indeed Montesquieu is treated as something of an honorary Whig by his northern British admirers. As such, he must be a figure of major importance in the story of whig ethnology; but he does not define its starting-point.

Sahlins (1976), to take another example, makes Hobbes the apical ancestor of anthropology, for his sense (in sympathy with Evans-Pritchard's characterization of the Nuer system as 'ordered anarchy') that the problem of society is the problem of creating order among human populations whose propensity is to resist restraint. Constructing such an intellectual lineage, or any other, for one's sense of where the core of anthropology is to be found is perfectly legitimate. But if what we want to know is the story of whig ethnology we will not begin with Hobbes, whose inclinations are royalist, but with the English Revolution of 1688, and with John Locke, whiggism's first theorist. In this essay I should like to give a brief version of that story, severely condensed, by juxtaposing the writings of Locke and Morgan on American Indians, from either end of its natural period. But first I should like to develop the concept somewhat more fully.

The essence of whig ethnology is the idea of progress, which supplies the fundamental logic for its classification of nations extended across space and time. The idea of progress is of course characteristic of the whole of Europe in the Age of Reason, not only of Britain. Europeans for the first time felt confident about themselves, in relation to their own past and in relation to other nations. They believed they had become civilized. Civilization is a notoriously vague notion, but one that includes, always, a hint at least of the great reformation of manners that came about at the end of the age of feudalism, summed up in the word 'civility'. The aristocracy began to soften the warrior style of life by studying books of politeness, learning to dance, and using perfume, if not actually bathing. But civilization referred especially to the 'revival of letters' that attended the recovery of Greek literature, and to the expansion of commerce, and consciousness, that attended the great voyages of discovery, above all the discovery of the New World.

We speak, then, of an ethnology of expanding horizons, the necessary condition, it would seem, for a belief in scientific knowledge as cumulative, growing in bulk and refinement, in science as 'future wisdom'. This is different in kind from an ethnology of shrinking or stable or slowly widening horizons, more given perhaps to kinds of knowledge whose perceived task is to recover and preserve ancient wisdom. The ethnologies of late antiquity and of medieval

Europe were decidedly unself confident. It is inadequate, surely, but perhaps not excessively unfair to describe them as, more or less, the endless rehashing of what could be found in biblical and Latin authors. Into this mould was poured new matter from traveller's reports of non-Christian nations that inspired wonder and often feelings of inferiority and envy. The Muslims of the *Chanson de Roland*, for example, are hateful people who live in sumptuous palaces of marble far superior to those of their Christian antagonists. By the eighteenth century, however, Europeans are confident that their learning has outstripped that of the Greeks and Romans, and that of all Asia as well. The entire scaffolding of nineteenth-century social evolutionism is in place. There are already the three stages of savagery, barbarism and civilization, or the fourfold series of hunting and fishing, herding, agriculture and commerce, in both cases with Europe at the top. There is also the identification of the cultures of non-Europeans with the culture of Europe's past. The consciousness of European progress was, at the same time, a conviction that the rest of the world had not advanced as far as Europe had.

Whig ethnology, then, is one variant of this European story of progress, the variant that came to be dominant in Britain. The peculiarities of the whig version of the story of progress are mainly two: the whig version is built around the story of liberty, especially British liberty, and it identifies the growth of Protestantism with the advancement of liberty. Each of these two terms requires some comment.

In the English Revolution of 1688, Parliament successfully asserted its right to choose the king, setting aside the Stuart heir, who showed an alarming fondness for Catholicism, and inviting the Protestant William of Orange to become king. Parliamentary supremacy and the cause of Protestantism were united in a single victorious struggle against the claims of royal absolutism. Propagandists for royal absolutism, such as Robert Filmer (in his *Patriarcha*), had attempted to show that royal power was God-given, natural and unlimited, and Hobbes' contract theory (in *Leviathan*) was to similar effect. The answering propaganda of whig theorists, beginning with Locke, took one of two forms. Locke himself argued that liberty was natural and original to the human condition and that encroachments upon it by kings constituted despotism or tyranny contrary to nature. Other whigs argued that the British constitution and its liberties went back to an ancient, specifically Anglo-Saxon past, and had survived successive royal encroachments by Norman and Tudor monarchs. (In this case, British liberty tends to be seen as a peculiarly British formation.)<sup>2</sup> Under both arguments the achievements of the English Revolution were interpreted as the restoration of an ancient condition of liberty, not as the creation of liberty for the first time. Whigs opposed unlimited monarchy, but they were not, in their first age, believers in democracy. Their ideal was what they achieved, a monarchy limited by Parliament.

The Protestant element in whiggism defined itself in opposition to Catholicism by means of the distinction between religion and superstition. Where Catholics had applied the label of superstition to folk religion unsanctified by the Church,

2. On the varieties of the Whig doctrine of liberty, see Burrow 1981: 21-28.

Protestants applied it to Catholicism and argued that it was supported by self-interested priests, or 'priestcraft'. Protestantism viewed itself, in flattering contrast, as true religion purified of superstition and rescued from priestcraft. This, too, was essentially a restorationist view and not a progressive one. But in the English Revolution, Protestantism and liberty were identified in a single success story. Although Protestantism had at various times opposed free speech and supported royal absolutism, it now became possible to read its own past as part and parcel of a great story, beginning with Luther, of the growth of liberty, the purification of religion, and the advancement of knowledge.

Protestantism, so conceived, is in its essence identified with liberty and science. The whig interpretation of European history, then, is this great story of liberty, true religion and knowledge. It was probably because of the conjunction of liberal and Protestant projects in the English Revolution that the Enlightenment in Britain was far more Christian and far less sceptical (excepting always Hume and Gibbon) than was the case in France—a point of considerable consequence when we are devising methods by which to clarify what we mean when we say that anthropology is the child of the Age of Reason. Nevertheless, we have to recognize that atheism was now, perhaps for the first time, not merely a theoretical zero of Christianity, but an actual option, and that there were undercurrents of resistance to the consensus position in Britain.

The intersection of these two dimensions of whig thought define its proper home as Protestant Britain and, by extension, Protestant British America.<sup>3</sup> This world, of course, was not self-enclosed; on the contrary, its boundaries were permeable, its horizons enlarging. But while it participated in the great movements of European thought and was greatly affected by such continental thinkers as Montesquieu and Rousseau, whig ethnology had a coherence distinctively its own, drawn round its defining themes. Again, while whiggism was British and Protestant, it was neither Irish nor Catholic. Indeed, for Catholic Ireland whiggism was not good news: as Macaulay somewhere notes with regret, England's liberty was purchased at the price of Ireland's.

Even at the level of pure ideas, coherence is never easily achieved. In this brief characterization of the whiggish view readers will have seen that there is a certain dissonance between the notion of progress and the doctrine of ancient liberty, to which we should add the tension between belief in ancient wisdom (scripture) and future wisdom (the book of nature, science). We shall examine this matter more closely below.

The Locke-to-Morgan story of whig ethnology I will present has the advantage of brevity, achieved, however, by the drastic expedient of retaining only the beginning and end of the story and throwing away the middle. Inevitably, such

3. Butterfield (1965: 4) notes, uncharitably, that the majority of the great patriarchs of history writing 'seem to have been whigs and gentlemen when they have not been Americans'. I should suggest a comma after 'whigs', for whether they were gentlemen or not, the Americans were also whigs, after their own fashion.

simplification will create a false sense of direct development from the A to the Z of whig ethnology. An adequate telling—which this decidedly is not—would have to take a great many other developments into account. The big issues, it seems to me, are mainly five: the theory of economic stages, as developed especially by such enlightened Scots as Adam Smith, Adam Ferguson and John Millar; the language-led ethnology of Sir William Jones and others; the study of race, including the Jeffersonian Samuel Stanhope Smith and the great British ethnologist James Cowles Prichard; kinship (Morgan); and religion (Tylor).<sup>4</sup> Many of these figures contributed ideas that have proved to be of enduring value, which makes them especially appealing. The story of whig ethnology could, of course, be told as another exercise in ‘unmasking’ the conjuncture of ethnology and colonialism, but experience of this mode suggests that the question of value would have to be set aside at the outset. Evading the question of the value of what has been achieved would, to my taste, make the exercise far too easy to be interesting. I believe it is more useful to put the tension between its effects for good and for ill at the centre of the story of whig ethnology.

The issue of race is perhaps the most difficult to clarify. Tentatively, I am inclined to put it in this way: whig ethnology holds that savagery is the past of civilization and that civilization is the future of savagery. Europe is civilization in its fullest development, in relation to which all non-Europeans are in some sense put in the wrong. The association of dark complexion with non-civilization is taken as empirical fact, and in this the whiggish view has some of the same effects as racism. At the same time, it is important to be clear that it is distinct from racism proper, in particular from the ‘scientific racism’ that claims, by appealing to the authority of science, that the mental capacities of the races differ. Scientific racism enjoyed a steady growth in the nineteenth century, but in tension with Protestant religion and whig ethnology and as an undercurrent of resistance to them. For Protestants, it violates the biblical story of human unity; for Whigs, it eats at the heart of the story of progress. The whig view is essentially environmentalist, in that it argues that humans are at bottom the same and that they differ because of differences in education and experience. One of the characteristic products of this view is the theory of liberal imperialism that emerges under British rule in India: British rule, though despotic (and un-whiggish), is justified in so far as it raises the level of civilization in India, and prepares it for liberty.

I hope I have made the idea of whig ethnology reasonably clear. Now I should like to give some of the complications, so that readers can better judge whether it is interesting. To do so, I shall examine the ethnology of John Locke and of Lewis Henry Morgan. Locke’s works are well known, but for Morgan I will use, besides his well-known Iroquois writings, a not very well known piece with the intriguing title ‘Montezuma’s Dinner’.

4. Such a telling will have the great advantage of Stocking’s excellent *Victorian Anthropology* (1987), which covers much of this territory. Bowler’s *Fossils and Progress* (1976) makes good use of the notion of a whig interpretation in reference to nineteenth-century palaeontology.

*The Ethnology of John Locke*

Locke's two greatest works were published in 1689, the year following the English Revolution. They are the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and his political tract, the *Two Treatises on Government*.

Locke was no ethnographer, but he was an avid reader and collector of narratives of travel in the non-European world, and his knowledge of it was perhaps as good as any that could be got from books at the end of the seventeenth century. He had 275 or so books of voyages, travels and geography in his library, which has been called 'a very remarkable collection' for the time (Laslett 1971: 27). They figure largely in a notebook of extracts from his reading on what Laslett (*ibid.*) calls social or comparative anthropology and what Locke himself called ethics.

A huge, four-volume collection of voyages and travels in his collection contains an introductory piece called 'The Whole History of Navigation from its Original to this Time' (Anon. 1704) (the 'Original' being Noah's ark) that has often been attributed to Locke. Although the attribution is questionable, it is morally certain that he read it and probable that its substance coincided with his outlook.<sup>5</sup>

'The Whole History of Navigation' dwells particularly on the discovery of America by Columbus and on the practical and philosophical implications of the New World for Europeans. America is greater in extent than Asia, Africa and Europe severally, we are told, and not much less than the three put together. It is the greater for the silver-mines of Peru and Mexico and the gold-mines of Chile, and their equal in the other blessings of nature. America is a world by itself, concealed from the rest for over 5,000 years—that is, for the greater part of human history, according to biblical chronology. The author wondered how it could be so large and yet remain hid so long; the wit of man, he says, cannot conclude how people first came to it and made it so well inhabited, and why no others could find the way since. The fertility of its soil is stupendous, 'producing all sorts of fruits and plants which the other parts of the world afford, in greater perfection than in their native land, besides an infinity of others which will not come to perfection elsewhere' (Anon. 1704: xxxvi).

This seems of a piece with the fascination for America we find in Locke's work, reference to which he makes repeatedly in the *Second Treatise* and occasionally in the *Essay*. It is not too much to say that in the *Second Treatise* he wished to theorize the place of America in world history, and that throughout his

5. This text was first attributed to Locke in the third edition (1744) of the *Collection of Voyages* (originally brought out by his publishers Awnsham and John Churchill in 1704) and was included in editions of Locke's *Works* beginning with the ninth (1794). De Beer rejects the attribution (cited in Attig 1985: 163). Laslett thinks it likely that Locke advised the Churchills in the production of this huge collection even if he did not edit it; he certainly seems to have lent them books from his library for the purpose (Laslett 1971: 19).

writings the many references to non-Europeans indicate a desire to speak ethnologically in order to speak universally. In the *Essay*, for example, all sixteen of the authorities quoted in the 1705 edition have to do with comparative anthropology and comparative religion (Laslett 1971: 28). Let us therefore look at Locke's ethnology, first in the *Essay*, then in the *Second Treatise*.

### *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*

For Locke, human knowledge has two sources. Primary ideas are formed by impressions upon the senses acting upon the mind as a more or less passive matrix much as a seal upon wax or chalk on a blank slate. Secondary ideas are formed by the mind in active mode, sorting primary ideas by comparison, abstraction and so forth, creating concepts more or less artificial and peculiar to the language in which they are expressed—in short, creating classes. Thus the growth of knowledge has the character of discovery and making. What he specifically denies, vehemently and at length, is the notion that the mind has innate ideas that are stamped upon it, such that, as in the Platonic conception, the acquisition of knowledge is a kind of 'remembering' of soul-knowledge rather than the 'discovery' of an outer world. This was a considerable departure from accepted views and was much attacked as tending to undermine traditional proofs of God's existence. Indeed, Locke deploys his ethnographic knowledge in his demolition job upon the belief that knowledge of God is innate, showing by reference to authority that there exist whole nations of atheists (1975: 87).

In spite of the pugnacious spirit of that demonstration, Locke's purpose is wholly pious, and he means neither to undermine the scriptures nor to rationalize natural science in an anti-religious cause. But of these two kinds of knowledge, scriptural-religious and natural-scientific, the first has the disadvantage of being the cause of interminable arguments about the meaning of the sacred text, though the text be true, and the second, concerning nature, has, he thinks, inescapable limits; he is not, then, a cheerleader for his scientist friends Boyle and Newton. What he aims to do in the *Essay* is to establish practical knowledge, that is, moral philosophy. He optimistically reckons that it is possible to discover by dispassionate reasoning moral truths as certain as theorems of geometry and, like geometry, commanding the agreement of rational men. This moral philosophy will contain his political theory and his ethnology.

There is a method of linguistic research, associated with Noam Chomsky, that some wag has named 'English, for example'. Anthropology, as conducted in a philosopher's study, necessarily follows the method of 'me, for example'. Thus Locke's generalizations about human understanding draw, in the first place, upon his own, that is, upon the understanding of an Englishman of a certain time and situation. That this method has disadvantages will be obvious. For example, I cannot help thinking that his notion of the mind of the newborn as a blank slate could only have been entertained by someone who had no children of his own. However that may be, in his attempt to speak of the human in general, he is at

pains to consider the mental operations of persons at a distance from his station: children, idiots, 'naturals', labourers and savages—not that they are interchangeable, rather they have in common that they fall short in some way of the 'rational man' who is the standard of Locke's discourse.

This Lockean rational man inhabits a world a good bit different from our own. Let us briefly inspect its main features. Human beings have a history that unfolds itself in the brief, biblical duration that amounts to exactly 5,639 years prior to the publication of the *Essay* (1975 [1689]: 194). Human mind has a middling rank in the scale of mind in which the beings of the world are ranked into a hierarchy of powers, the several ranks so closely linked together, without discernible gaps, that it is not easy to discover the boundaries between them (*ibid.*: 446-7, 666). There are in all probability as many intelligent beings superior to man and ascending upward to the infinite perfection of the Creator as there are inferior beings descending by gentle degrees below. Locke surprises us by speaking of life on other planets, whole, other worlds of sentient beings (*ibid.*: 555). The boundaries between species are hard to discern and likely to be of man's making. Locke considers, among other problems that make classification uncertain, the problem of apparently rational talking animals, such as Baalam's ass in the Bible and Prince Maurice's rational parrot, the latter a very droll story which I highly recommend and reluctantly pass over in the interest of brevity (*ibid.*: 333, 456). He also considers reports of men with tails.

How are savages positioned within this world? We might expect that Locke would treat the races of the human kind as separate species in the scale of mind, but this he clearly does not do. It is, he tells us, an English child's error to consider the Negro not a man because a skin of white or flesh colour in England is part of the child's complex idea of what he calls man (*ibid.*: 607). Throughout his text it is clear that savages are examples of the species man. What, then, is the nature of the difference between the savage and the civilized?

The difference, of course, is to be found in knowledge, in the lesser knowledge of the savage. Since knowledge is not innate, the savage condition is not so; knowledge is founded on experience, and it is the narrower, more limited experience of the savage that makes his knowledge what it is and less than that of the civilized. Experience means especially productive interactions with nature, and it is a low level and constricted range of experience that makes a savage.

Locke's doctrine of language is developmental. Civilized languages have a vocabulary that is copious, the product of wide horizons of experience, while savage languages are 'scanty' (*ibid.*: 433). In an intriguing passage Locke speaks of having conversed with some Americans who, though 'of quick and rational Parts enough', could not count to a thousand and had no distinct idea of that number, 'though they could reckon very well to 20', so that for the larger numbers they would indicate the hairs of their head to express a great many. This inability, then, is not due to a want of rational capacity but, as Locke says, because their language is scanty and 'accommodated only to the few necessities of a needy simple Life'. Unacquainted with trade or mathematics, they had no word for a

thousand (ibid.: 207). Languages, for Locke, are constructed from experience, words expressing complex ideas being the built-up effects of interactions with nature or reflexes of human custom.

Locke is a strict environmentalist. The level of knowledge for any individual will depend upon the richness of the human environment in which he is placed, not upon heredity: 'Had you or I been born at the Bay of *Soldania*, possibly our Thoughts, and Notions, had not exceeded those brutish ones of the *Hotentots* that inhabit there: And had the *Virginia* King *Apochancana*, been educated in *England*, he had, perhaps, been as knowing a Divine, and as good a Mathematician, as any in it.' The difference between the Indian and a 'more improved Englishman' lies in the fact that the exercise of his mind is bounded within the limited 'Ways, Modes and Notions of his own Country' (ibid.: 92). What separates the savage from the civilized condition is not mental capacity based on race, but a history of the development of productive powers. In America, abounding in all sorts of natural plenty, the ignorance of useful arts is due largely to ignorance of iron; and were the use of iron lost among us, we should soon be 'reduced to the Wants and Ignorance of the ancient savage *Americans*, whose natural Endowments and Provisions come no way short of those of the most flourishing and polite Nations' (ibid.: 646).

The child, the savage and the labourer do not know the maxims that the schoolmen wrongly suppose innate, from a common cause, a limited experience of life: 'their Notions are few and narrow', drawn from the small number of objects with which they have most to do: 'A Child knows his Nurse, and his Cradle, and by degrees the Playthings of a little more advanced Age: and a young Savage has, perhaps, his Head fill'd with Love and Hunting, according to the fashion of his Tribe.' Labourers, who make up the greatest part of mankind, are 'enslaved to the Necessity of their mean Condition', their lives worn out in the quest for the mere provisions for living. Their opportunities for knowledge and enquiry are as narrow as their fortune, and their whole time and pains are devoted to stilling the croaking of their own bellies or the cries of their children. It is 'Leisure, Books, and Languages, and the Opportunity of Conversing with variety of Men' that make the rational man, and these the labourer cannot have. We meet the unity of the child, the savage and the labourer frequently in the social evolutionists of two centuries later.

Thus, by excluding innate knowledge Locke excludes a racist treatment of savages in the strict sense. By making knowledge a result of experience and especially of productive interactions with nature, his is a doctrine of *developmentalism*. It is knowledge of iron, it is navigation and travel, it is commerce that makes knowledge grow, and lack of them that puts the child, the savage and the labourer in a state of ignorance. Knowledge is progressive discovery, not remembering what is eternally true and imprinted on the soul.

This is the story of knowledge in Locke. I turn now to the *Second Treatise*, to see its relation to the stories of liberty and of property.

*The Second Treatise (On Civil Government)*

'Thus in the beginning all the World was *America*, and more so than that is now; for no such thing as Money was any where known' (49).<sup>6</sup> The *America* of this passage excludes the empires of Mexico and Peru; it is 'in the middle of the inland Parts of *America*, where [a man] had no hopes of Commerce with other Parts of the World' (48). This *America* excites Locke's imagination, because it is 'still a Pattern of the first Ages in *Asia* and *Europe*' (108); thus, in his developmental view of history, *America* becomes the past of Eurasia, the savage an ancestor of the civilized, the whole, just barely, a theory of stages by the positing of the minimum of two stages in sequence.

Locke's purpose in the First Treatise had been to refute the theory of the royalist Filmer that the rights of kings were ancient and natural, having been derived by hereditary descent from Adam; and further to show that it is, rather, popular liberty that is ancient and natural. The Americans are useful to his theory because they are closest to the zero of developmental history. They are 'rich in Land and poor in all the Comforts of Life', liberally provided by nature with a fruitful soil, yet because they have not improved it by their labour they 'have not one hundredth part of the Conveniences we enjoy: And a King of a large and fruitful Territory there feeds, lodges, and is clad worse than a day Labourer in England' (41).

However, the true zero of the story is not a developmental stage but a condition, the state of nature prior to the compact by which humans enter into civil society, a condition of natural liberty and full agency that individuals partially cede, but which nations continue to enjoy, in their dealings with one another, after their creation. It is in this state that individual agents create property by mixing their labour with the things found in the common of nature, that is, by mere appropriation, prior to any laws of property; and from it that, even after the creation of polities, they continue to appropriate when, for example, they take fish from the sea. The state of nature is admittedly conjectural and a product of theory, not surviving evidence, because records begin only some time after civil government is formed; and individuals abandon it very early in history because of its manifold 'inconveniences', of which the critical one has to do with the protection of private property. Locke treats the American Indians as close to this state, lacking money, which creates differentials of wealth, but possessed of kings. We find, then, one-man rule in the earliest history of commonwealths. But *America* provides evidence that the people, though they commonly prefer the heir of the deceased king, yet exercise their natural right to pass over the heir if they find him in any way weak or incapable. Moreover, the kings of the Indians in *America* are little more than generals of their armies and exercise very little dominion in peacetime (105, 108).

6. References to the text of the *Second Treatise* are to the section numbers of the 1988 edition.

America, then, as the pattern of the first ages in Asia and Europe, lends no credence to Filmer's proof that absolute monarchy is natural and ancient but, on the contrary, shows a limited kingship and the popular exercise of natural rights in choosing kings. This is the case, more precisely, of those Americans who, 'living out of reach of the Conquering Swords and spreading domination of the two great Empires of *Peru* and *Mexico*', enjoyed their own natural freedom and controlled the succession of their kings (105). In short, the American Indians were whigs and enjoyed a mixed constitution as did the English, except in Peru and Mexico, where empire and conquest encroached unnaturally upon liberty.

Summing up this all too brief account, we find Locke's ethnology entwined with the three master stories: of knowledge, of liberty, and of property. The stories of knowledge and of property are parallel and causally linked. Starting from the assumption of a homogeneous human understanding of which there are no racially differential varieties, the growth of knowledge and language arises through experiences of nature, especially the productive interactions of making, commerce and travel. The incremental accretions to national wealth through private improvement and industry in history proceeds in tandem with the growth of ideas and language, and appears to be both its condition and its effect. The story of knowledge and the story of property, then, is a developmental or progressive one.

The story of liberty, on the other hand, presents quite a different profile; indeed, since it is present in the state of nature and at the very outset of history, and since it is never cancelled but only usurped, it cannot be said to have a history at all, but to permeate history as a constant, uniform substance. It is the usurpations—despotism, tyranny or absolute monarchy—that arise in history, against nature. Tyranny has a beginning, but liberty is timeless.

### *Lewis H. Morgan*

Turning now to Morgan, nearly two centuries hence—raised on Locke and whiggism of the American variety—we find him in his early researches on the Iroquois bringing that whiggism to the field.

Locke's knowledge of Indians had been wholly mediated by books, and for the most part he constructed his whiggish view of them out of Jesuit sources, in the absence of a Protestant missionary endeavour of any moment. In following years, the whig ethnology of the American Indians began to grow. Cadwallader Colden's *History of the Five Nations* (1743) likened the League of the Iroquois to the United Republic of Holland and republican Rome; Adam Ferguson's highly favourable picture of the Iroquois and Hurons recalled the Scottish highlanders and Sparta (1966 [1767]). Neither of these portraits, however, penetrates very deeply

into Indian social structure; they are views from above, which treat of political institutions without getting at the kinship structures on which they are based.

Morgan had consulted books of history on the Iroquois, but he found them wanting. One book he read had an Iroquois chief succeeded by his son, while the surprising fact that Morgan found in his fieldwork was that the Iroquois are matrilineal, their chiefly offices descending within matrilineal clans, in principle, that is, from mother's brother to sister's son. Morgan, unlike Locke, was not well read in the older ethnographies; he had read Coldon and Charlevoix, but had he also read Lafitau's *Moeurs des sauvages américains* (1724)—as Tylor was unkind enough to point out—he would not have thought his discovery of Iroquois matriliney original. However, it was certainly to the benefit of anthropology that he abandoned the library for the good people of Tonawanda to learn about what he called, in the title of his famous 1851 monograph, *The League of the Iroquois*.

Morgan's Iroquois fieldwork finally laid bare the structure of the Iroquois league. The critical find was the list of the 50 'federal' chiefs whose councils constituted the league itself. They came from each of the five nations, namely, Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga and Seneca. These nations were composed of eight matrilineal clans called Wolf, Bear, Turtle etc., and each of the 50 chiefships were the property of particular segments of particular clans of particular nations. The senior woman of the clan segment chose the chief; and since membership was matrilineal, a chief could not be succeeded by his own son, who belonged to the clan of the wife. Clan segments owned agricultural fields and lived in longhouses, eating from a common pot. At the base of the Iroquois league lay the family, Morgan found, and it was very different indeed from the family as he knew it (Morgan 1851; Trautmann 1987: ch. 3).

To these ethnographic findings, Morgan brought a whiggish interpretation. Much like Locke, he found the Iroquois to be whigs, but they were American-style whigs. Where Locke admired a mixed constitution of kings limited by popular liberty and found it in the Indians of Virginia, Morgan, living in a republic, found elected chiefs governing democratically, by discussion and consensus. The perfect democracy of the Iroquois, however, was not based upon personal property, for they had none of consequence, but upon the kinship base of matrilineal clans and the elective chiefships of clan segments. Land was, rather, clan owned, not private; and clanship governed what he called 'communism in living'—living, that is, not in nuclear families but by clans, in longhouses, eating from a common pot once a day, the men before the women. It is, indeed, a fierce love of liberty that leads the Iroquois to design their institutions in such a way as to outlaw private property in land and to base them upon the family relationship in the peculiar matrilineal form that prevents the son from succeeding the father and so prevents the growth of tyranny and hereditary privilege. Thus the whig doctrine of Locke exchanges its abstract, philosophical character for the empirical content of Iroquois fundamental institutions, which are, then, interpreted in the light of the whig doctrine of the natural character of liberty.

Thus in every political respect the Iroquois are worthy forerunners of the American republic and differ from their Euroamerican betters only in their underdevelopment of knowledge and property. Unlike Locke, however, who assimilates the Mexicans to the idea of empire and despotism, Morgan finds them too to be whigs. This is the conclusion of a strange and wonderful article with the strange and wonderful title of 'Montezuma's Dinner' (Morgan 1876).

Morgan's article on the Aztecs is a full-throated polemic, and for that reason a very good read. The objects of his wrath are the historians, as with his earlier attack upon the trustworthiness of the historians of the Iroquois—in this instance later writers, both Spanish and American, and more especially Morgan's senior contemporaries, Prescott and H. H. Bancroft, as well as eye-witness accounts of the conquest, including those of Cortez and Bernal Diaz. All use the language of feudal Europe to describe the Aztecs (the language of kings, emperors, lords, palaces and the like) and deploy the concepts—highly charged in the whig lexicon—of despotism and empire. So, laconically, had Locke, as we have seen.

As against that way of approaching the Aztecs, Morgan's article insists that a science of American ethnology can only be based on the direct study of living societies. We must, he says, do as Herodotus did and visit native tribes in their villages, studying their institutions as living organisms. Only then will Indian society become intelligible, because its structure and principles will be understood. Indian societies belong to the stages of savagery and barbarism, and their institutions, inventions and customs find no analogues in those of civilized nations. In short, out of the library and into the field.

The illustrative case is the daily meal of Montezuma, described by the conquerors and enlarged upon by subsequent writers. Every day some 600 lords dined with the emperor, some 300 dishes being prepared and kept warm on chafing dishes of burning charcoal, served to them by some 300 pages in a vast palace.

Morgan believes that even the Spanish eyewitnesses misconstrued the import of what they saw, and he makes bold to put them right by means of comparative knowledge of living Indian societies, especially, of course, the Iroquois. The Aztecs, he avers, were a confederacy of three tribes, probably further subdivided into clans. The office of chief was probably hereditary in specific clans. Montezuma had a council of chiefs who were not advisors but rather the effective co-rulers; Montezuma himself was perhaps a war chief, certainly not a king or emperor. It is likely that the Aztecs and their chiefs were matrilineal, with succession passing to brothers and nephews (i.e. sisters' sons). We have, then, a gentile or clan-and-kinship-based society fundamentally different from political society based on territory and property.

Ownership of land among the Aztecs, he continues, was in common, and there was no knowledge of ownership in fee simple. The obligations of hospitality were weighty, to the point that they tended to equalize subsistence. Thus the Spaniards were not lodged and fed out of a centrally controlled stock, but billeted upon a whole clan. The daily meal was divided from a common pot—communism in living. Indian houses, too, were characterized by a communal architecture and

composition: Montezuma's house was not the palace of a king but a joint-tenement house (of a clan). As among the Iroquois, it was the custom to eat but one meal a day, the men eating first, the women and children after. The parallel with the Iroquois is complete, and the difference is only of scale, not of structure.

Many of Morgan's rereadings of the conquerors' testimony are offered as possibilities rather than certainties, and one of them—the matrilineal descent of the Aztecs—is certainly wrong. But the great virtue of this scholarly exercise of cut and thrust is that it served to reorient the study of American civilizations away from a European frame of reference, and towards an Americanist framework of comparative ethnology. The benefits of Morgan's excellent programme lie in its method and conceptualization, not in his conclusions. Later scholars, such as the Meso-American specialist Adolph Bandelier, who was truly Morgan's student, would put it to work with good effect (see Waterman 1917 and White 1940).

Meanwhile, it is for us to note that Morgan's Aztecs have been transformed from earlier renderings in terms of opulence and empire into democrats and socialists of an early, underdeveloped type, the first appealing to Americans, the second to Marx and Engels, and neither, it would seem, to his British contemporaries, or in all likelihood to Locke.

### *Conclusion*

To conclude what, as yet, has no proper conclusion, allow me to hazard a few comments about what seem to me the most significant features of the ethnology I have been trying to evoke, leaving untouched the many other features that provide, together, nearly endless mental provocations. Whiggish developmentalism, then, including the strong form—the belief that the historical process is guided onward and upward towards forms now best exemplified by Protestant Anglo-Saxons, through the slow, steady pressure of an immanent law of progress, governs the story of knowledge and the story of property. It is intrinsically environmentalist, not racialist; yet, as in other, European versions of the idea of progress, it has the effect of putting non-European nations in the wrong and of justifying European domination under the notion of tutelage, this being the theory of liberal imperialism. What an examination of Locke and Morgan on the American Indians shows, however, is that the shape of whiggish ethnology is not the simple rising edge of an inclined plane or a parabola. For in respect of liberty there is no history at all, let alone a story of development; at best, history intrudes upon an original and permanent state of liberty as a series of episodes of loss through despotism, and recovery through revolutions, which must, to this way of thinking, have the character of restorations. The Indians play a complex role in the whiggish story, then, both as underdeveloped, ignorant savages, but also as

fierce libertarians. There is a certain romanticizing here, but it is different, for example, from that of Rousseau, who uses noble savages to denounce civilization.

At a deeper level, it seems to me that the disjuncture between liberty and developmentalism in whiggism accounts for a certain incoherence in the concept of nature and the natural, and the relation of savagery to it. Liberty is natural in that it is primitive in the exact sense of the word, that is, as the original condition of the human kind. It is in respect of liberty, then, that savages are thought of as being close to nature, of being *Naturvölker* in the whiggish way. On the other hand, knowledge, science (even religious knowledge) is subject to a developmental process, such that it grows ever larger in body and better refined, improvement in knowledge meaning a better correspondence to nature. In this respect it is the civilized, rational man who is the more natural, and the science and religion of the savage is seen to be unnatural, arbitrary and false. I believe the whiggish outlook is internally conflicted on the question of the relation of savagery to nature and that the principle cleavage falls here; but that is a large and complex story.

We have snapped a chalkline stretched between Locke and Morgan. The straight blue mark that connects them is far too thin and simple a figure by which to represent how whig ethnology develops over time and what it is that happens when whiggism goes on fieldwork. But the case of Morgan is enough, perhaps, to suggest that it isn't all, and only, an exercise in bending the refractory and baffling experience of the Other into received moulds. Something new and useful has come out of the meditation on the daily meal of Montezuma and family—as well as something old, familiar, whiggish, even Lockean.

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## RITUALIZATION AS SUBSTITUTION

JANUSZ MUCHA

### *Introduction*

THE term 'ritual' has traditionally been used in the analysis of religious phenomena (see, for example, Durkheim 1954 [1912]). In modern symbolic anthropology it is also used to describe other fields of behaviour where it has proven to be relevant (see, for example, Firth 1972; Goody 1961; and Skorupski 1983). However, traditional ideas relating ritual to the sacred are also useful in analysing the ritualization of political behaviour. In this essay I will attempt to show how rituals can substitute for the traditional, instrumental meanings of these types of behaviour, rather than highlighting them or indicating their social significance. The extension of 'ritual' as a term to characterize attitudes, beliefs, things and actions in various spheres of human life results in conceptual confusion (Leach 1968). Taking this into account I shall try, as an initial step, to outline a conceptual framework suitable for my analysis of political ritualization.

First of all, we cannot discuss ritual without introducing an obviously arbitrary distinction between 'technical' (or 'rational') and 'symbolic' actions. Behaviour is technical when, in the judgement of the observer, it is a necessary means whereby a human individual or group achieves a specific end. Behaviour is symbolic when, according to this same judgement, it is not necessary from a

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technological, causal point of view. Some actions serve to do things, that is, to alter the physical state of the world, while others serve to say or communicate something. The problem arises when the same individual human activity (for example, crafts like basketry or pottery) serves both to do and to communicate something at the same time (see, for example, Benedict 1949; Goody 1961: 159; La Fontaine 1972; Leach 1968: 523; and Turner 1982: 19). A more important problem arises when we are interested in social actions that intentionally aim at changing the social world, that is, at changing the actions or attitudes of other people. In this kind of behaviour, we can distinguish only instrumental and symbolic aspects. Systems of meanings (or symbolic actions) surrounding instrumental or technical actions may themselves exert influence on these instrumental or technical actions (or aspects of actions). Symbolic activity (or aspects of activity) gives an additional significance and highlights the technical or social-instrumental action or relationship that is itself important for the given social group. It is 'marketing' or making widely known what is ceremonialized (Mair 1971: 209; Skorupski 1983: 161).

Secondly, ritual is for anthropologists a system of prescribed, standardized, formalized behaviour regulating and controlling a social situation. Ritual provides an image of how, according to tradition (or to its organizers) things should be, what the social order should look like. Ritual allows the conceptual control of the environment, motivates individuals towards active participation in the social life of a group, and facilitates the concentration of attention on the requirements of unusual situations (see, for example, Firth 1972: 3; La Fontaine 1972: 160; Skorupski 1983: 91; Parker 1984). Performances of ritual must be regarded, then, as phases in a broad social process that has to be analysed in order to determine the meanings of this specific ritual (see, for example, Turner 1982: 45).

Thirdly and lastly, the distinction between rites of passage and calendrical rituals (Van Gennep 1960) has proved useful in studies of political phenomena. The present essay deals only with this second type of ritual, referring almost always to large groups and quite often embracing whole societies (Turner 1977: 68-9).

Having outlined a conceptual and theoretical framework arising out of contemporary anthropology, I can return to the subject of this essay, which is devoted to just one function of the ritualization of social behaviour. The ritualization of behaviour means, for the purposes of this analysis, the extensive development of its symbolic aspects, without simultaneously developing its instrumental aspects, which according to tradition, the pledge of its participants, or the judgement of the observers, constitute its basic social significance. My thesis is that the ritualization of collective behaviour may serve not only to highlight, to 'market' the meaning of its instrumental aspects in a symbolic way, but also to substitute them after eliminating them or altering their traditional meaning. Ritualization as substitution will therefore be discussed later.

The phenomena I am talking about result, in my opinion, from simultaneous acceptance, or rather pledge of acceptance, in a given social system, of two

incompatible supreme values. This may occur in many spheres of human life. I shall limit myself to political phenomena. We are dealing in this case with, on the one hand, the sacralization of democracy, that is, the sovereignty of the people and only of the people, and on the other hand the sacralization of another centre of political power. These two ideas of the sacred are not consistent with one another in real political life. There is a way out, however, namely the attempt by the stronger centre of power to ritualize certain political actions, creating a symbolic 'over-reality' that would substitute the traditional, instrumental meaning of the centre of power that is weaker in this political system. This interpretation follows, to a certain extent, Merton's analysis of ritual: 'the ritualistic type of adaptation...involves the abandoning or scaling down of the lofty cultural goals...to the point where one's aspirations can be satisfied. But though one rejects the cultural obligations...one continues to abide almost compulsively by institutional norms' (Merton 1968: 203-4).

The kind of ritualization I discuss may take place in different types of society. It may occur in a type of society in which the centre of real power is a pluralistic parliament elected by the citizens, but in which there also exists a centre of apparent though once real power. Great Britain may serve as an example. The acceptance of the sovereignty of the people as a supreme value results in the fact that the House of Commons has the real political power. The acceptance of the monarchy as a symbol representing a continuity of historical tradition that the society does not want to give up results in tensions between the two political institutions:

No British statute states or implies that the people are exercising a sovereign function when they choose representatives. However, as the Queen must rule through ministers who are responsible to the House of Commons, that House must presumably derive its authority from some source, and this can be surely none other than the people who have chosen it. (Bromhead 1974: 167)

The tension is solved, in my opinion, through a ritualization of the monarch's political activities. The same rituals that in the past highlighted the monarch's real power now only replace it. Also significant from the point of view of this essay is the fact that the tension mentioned above exists solely at the level of the political constitution and has no important consequences for social consciousness.

Phenomena that take place in pluralist states are not, however, the subject of this discussion. I am interested in political behaviour in those monocentric states where the Communist Party's monopoly of power was officially regarded as sacred, but where a democratic rhetoric was extensively used for purposes of legitimation. Democratic arguments served also to justify the monopoly of the Party's power: the Party recognized the 'objective interest' of the proletariat which constituted the vast majority of society. But the sovereignty of the people was also accepted (or, better, was pledged as accepted), independently of the fact that the Party 'objectively' represented the majority. Both the sovereignty of the people and the leading role of the Party were constitutional rules declared to be inviolable.

Since these rules were incompatible, and real power was in the Party's hands, it compelled the ritualization of the sovereignty of the people.

Here I shall discuss only post-war Poland, limiting myself to the period that ended in the mid-1980s, and I shall present several examples of public, collective behaviour, the ritualization of which substituted its traditional, instrumental meanings. I must stress once again, though, that these phenomena occurred not only in Poland, and that we could also deal with other functions of the ritualization of political behaviour, of which the most widespread are religious rituals.

My first two examples concern activities that in similar external form also occur in pluralist countries, while the following examples are unique to 'socialist' political systems.

### *First Example: May Day Celebrations*

Let us begin with May Day celebrations. Since the end of the nineteenth century these had been organized regularly wherever the left-wing workers' movement was strong enough. The celebration consisted mainly in the 'demonstration' parade. The behaviour of the participating individuals was thus highly formalized. The parade was originally intended as a demonstration against the brutality of the capitalist state, but later it turned into a manifestation of the international solidarity of the working class in their demands for an eight-hour day. Eventually it came to express the unity of the proletariat in its support for political progress and for the political programme of left-wing parties, and to represent a protest against economic and social crises resulting from the capitalist mode of production. The issues around which the celebrations were organized were of real social significance. The parade itself, and the attendant speeches, slogans, banners, flags and picnics, may be treated as the ritualization of political class struggle conducted by the left. This ritualization was intended to indicate the special significance of the struggle, to highlight it. Symbols used by the left were easy to understand, both for participants of the event and for its opponents. Finally, we should mention that the May Day celebrations expressed the participants' belief in a happy future when all the needs of the working class would be met.

The situation changed after the abolition of capitalism. May Day celebrations were maintained, but actions very similar to those of the past now served to celebrate victory over the bourgeoisie (for the Soviet Union see, for example, Lane 1981; for Cuba, Aguirre 1984). After a few years there was no trace of the bourgeoisie, the eight-hour working day was in being and the party which considered itself the heir of the original left monopolized political power. Retaining the May Day ritual might be interpreted as a continuous renewal of the support of the working class for the new government, i.e. a symbolic stressing of its legitimization, but this hypothesis proves false. First, there exist independently

of the government no organizations of the proletariat that could organize the ritual (by the government or authorities I mean here the whole political centre, whatever its real and usually unknown composition, controlled by the Communist Party). It was organized by the authorities themselves in order to vest themselves with legitimacy. In countries under communist rule, any other authentic proletarian May Day demonstrations would serve to deprive the government of its legitimacy. In 1982 in Warsaw and in 1983 in Wrocław, Solidarity, by then already banned, organized counter-parades that expressed proletarian protest against the politics of the government, whose reaction did not differ from the reactions of bourgeois governments at the turn of the century. All such counter-parades were suppressed by the Zomo (riot police). I shall return to other aspects of these events later. Secondly, spontaneous working-class demonstrations against the communist authorities, like those in East Berlin in 1953, or in Poland in 1956, 1970, 1976, 1980 and later, show that we can hardly talk about the continuous support of the proletariat for the government. Thirdly, participation in official May Day parades was for many years obligatory. New developments in the 1970s and 1980s resulted in participation ceasing to be compulsory, but many people treated it as if it still were. Therefore, an alternative hypothesis seems to be more appropriate, namely that ritual existed to substitute what it had formerly expressed: spontaneous, authentic proletarian support for the left. The problem as to whether or not the organizers of the ritual were subjectively attached to the anniversary celebrated by the ritual will not be discussed here.

The May Day ritual had several important aspects. It was performed once a year, in the spring, always on the same day. Apart from the parade and the speeches that participants had to listen to, there was also the opportunity to take part in dancing and entertainments in the parks, to buy relatively cheap sandwiches with coveted but rarely available ham, to meet acquaintances and colleagues informally, to introduce one's children to them, and to take the children to see shows, sports events, entertainers, folk groups, and large and almost always very amusing puppet shows with figures representing the leading politicians of Western imperialist countries. Thus, even if it was obligatory, participation in the ritual itself might be rewarding. Ritualization motivated people to participate in this event whose real political meaning need not actually be identified during periods in which the political system was stable; attention was focused on the event.

Signals issued by the organizers of the May Day ritual concerned two different levels of phenomena simultaneously. On the one hand, they interpreted participation as the people's political support for the supreme value, namely the political system and those who represented it. On the other hand, participation was represented as a celebration of work, which was also a supreme value. The signal was probably received on the second level by those who, paying attention mostly to its popular and entertaining character, participated in the event voluntarily, and on the first level by those who, interpreting it in political terms, decided to take the risk (never very high) of not participating, by those who participated but saw their participation as compulsory, and by those who accepted the political system

totally. I must also add that in checking the list of participants in the 1950s and 1960s, the organizers were made totally aware that their ritual did not reflect authentic, spontaneous support for their politics. They saw no reason to seek it. It was enough for them to organize the ritual and to demonstrate what the reality would have been like if the support had actually existed. They forced people to participate in the ritual, participation that was then interpreted as an activity legitimizing their rule. The actions of the authorities, who demanded certain kinds of collective behaviour but did not actually punish those who deviated from it, could also be interpreted as ritualistic. I shall return to this problem below.

Whether voluntary or not, participation in the May Day ritual that resulted from a willingness to celebrate work or the political system as values, created a tension between the declared sovereignty of the people and the actual state of affairs, a tension well expressed by the necessity of marching in front of a grandstand, on which representatives of party and state authorities received greetings and flowers from the designated representatives of the people. The tension could be reduced through one's total identification with the political system, i.e. by the acceptance of being 'objectified'. For those who reacted to the ritual in this way, it fulfilled an instrumental as well as a substitutional purpose. Symbolic substitution was a means of subordinating society to the political system.

Let us return to the May Day counter-demonstrations. Participation in them was obviously voluntary and even involved the very real risk of being arrested. During these parades, national rather than Communist symbols were used, their role being to express the feeling that government policies were not only anti-proletarian but also anti-national. The counter-demonstrations were not only a manifestation of the delegitimization of the political system but also in a sense a deritualization of the May Day celebrations, an attempt to get back to their original meanings.

It is interesting to note that in 1981 the Polish Communist Party authorities organized a demonstration in Warsaw which was hardly ritualized at all, voluntary, small, quiet, with no grandstand. The next year, under martial law, the situation became in a sense normal again.

### *Second Example: Elections*

The second type of ritual I shall discuss is also similar in its performance in both pluralistic and some monolithic states, namely municipal and national elections. The origin of the idea of the general election is connected with the acceptance of the sovereignty of the people and of representative democracy. In pluralist political systems elections are first of all (but obviously not only) an instrumental kind of activity. Although there are many different electoral systems, the sense of the electoral process is common and depends upon the influence of the citizens (direct-

ly or through political parties) over whose names appear on the ballot and on the selection, from among the candidates, of the citizens' representatives. The act of putting up candidates and then voting is surrounded by additional actions and symbols that highlight the significance of the election process. This is actually a most important political act: within the framework of the constitution it can change the ruling group and the policy of the government quite radically. Elections take place regularly every fourth year or so, are completely formalized, and must be carried out strictly according to voting regulations. Both for the candidates and for the constituents they are a way of realizing their supreme value—representative democracy.

The election process had a quite different meaning in communist Poland. We must begin with a consideration of the dynamics of the voting regulations. The common element in these regulations was that there was only one ballot and that an umbrella organization controlled by the Communist Party held the monopoly of decision-making concerning the putting up of candidates and establishing the order in which they appeared on the ballot paper. A common but non-legal element was the political and disciplinary pressure not to cross any names off the ballot paper. In this case, according to the voting regulations, persons whose names were put near the beginning of the list on the ballot won automatically. From 1948, when the communist political system was established in Poland, there were only a very few cases where persons whose names were put at the end of the ballot paper were elected.

Some details in the voting regulations were changed. Before 1957, the number of candidates named on the ballot was equal to the number of seats in any given constituency. Between 1957 and 1980, the number of names exceeded the number of seats by a third. After 1984, two candidates 'competed' for each seat, though their order of precedence was actually established by the umbrella organization. Voting practice also changed to some extent. Between 1948 and 1980, the turnout was always, according to official figures, over 99%, but in 1984 it was only 75%.

Although, from the formal point of view, it had been possible since 1957 for the voter to indicate which candidate he preferred, this possibility had never existed in practice on a larger than individual scale. We cannot, then, regard municipal or national elections in Poland between the end of the Second World War and the mid-1980s as instrumental behaviour involving the influence of citizens on the shape of the political life of their country. The elections had merely a symbolic character. The ritualization of this phenomenon was to grant it a special significance, to motivate the people to participate in it, but the phenomenon itself did not actually mean what it meant in pluralistic political systems nor what its organizers declared. Elections were to replace the sovereignty of the people, not to emphasize it. There existed, however, an instrumental sense in the elections, for by means of them the authorities could change a part of the administrative apparatus. Obviously, it would have been much simpler and cheaper to appoint new officials, but here too the supreme value of the sovereignty of the people would not be recognized.

The authorities attached unusual significance to the proper performance of the electoral ritual. For them a turnout very close to 100% meant their total legitimization.<sup>1</sup> The turnout, as I have already mentioned, was more important than anything else, since in practical terms there was no way for a candidate whose name was at the bottom of the ballot paper to win. It was not even legally possible for a person not accepted by the authorities to become a candidate. The legitimating role the elections had for the political system and the ruling group was shown, for instance, by the fact that during the national elections at the beginning of 1980 the turnout was (according to the official figures) around 99.9%, and Party leaders received more than 99.9% of valid votes. A few months later, without special elections or a revolutionary change in the political system, they found themselves totally and unanimously condemned, thrown out of parliament and political life.

The ritualization of the election process did not always take the same character. Elections were always organized in such a way that the authorities kept them under control without any risk and at the same time stressed the enormous influence of the citizens on the results, that is, on who their representatives in local councils or in parliament would be. In a politically stable situation, when the people were passive through having internalized the pressure applied by the authorities, elections were just one of a number of periodic ritualized acts. When social tensions, even latent ones, were strong, the situation was different. The municipal elections of 1984 may serve as an example. The legitimization of the political system was shaken in the Solidarity period, and the legitimization of the ruling group was shaken by the necessity of introducing martial law and the harsh repression that followed it. In this situation, combining the idea of the leading role of the Communist Party with the idea of democracy needed a particular effort when the electoral ritual was organized.

Performance of the ritual had to be successful, and certain conditions had to be met. First, the ritual was delayed until a relatively quiet moment presented itself. Secondly, municipal elections were organized first. Thirdly, the ways of performing the ritual (i.e. the voting regulations) were changed a little, so that in the opinion of the authorities it could be presented as an instrumental activity. Certain methods of citizens' control were introduced into the voting process, but these obviously did not affect the basic rules. Moreover, the only 'democratic', although in practice dead rule, which had allowed groups of citizens to register their own candidates and to put them on the ballot paper, was withdrawn. Fourthly, an unprecedented campaign, even using television commercials, something very new to Poland at that time, was undertaken in order to motivate the people to vote. The main argument of the organizers was that 'only those who

1. It seems that on one occasion this really was the case. The national elections following the crisis of 1956 were of the nature of a plebiscite that, with the active support of the Primate of the Roman Catholic Church, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, legitimized a new ruling group under Władysław Gomułka.

are present are right': those who did not turn up at the polls deprived themselves of any influence on the shape of the local councils. I have already stressed that the voters were also deprived of influence. Fifthly and lastly, in public the authorities presented their conviction that their legitimacy would not be endangered even if the turnout was lower than usual. After the elections, the average turnout of around 75% was considered high enough, because it was close to similar statistics in Western democracies. The fact that in many working-class suburbs of the big cities the officially offered figure was only slightly higher than 50% was quietly forgotten. Under these conditions the performance of the ritual was highly successful: the government regarded its own legitimacy as having been confirmed.

Let us look at the election process as the voters saw it. The very few published sociological findings available (Bereza 1959; Gostkowski 1961; Borkowski, Ekiert and Mucha 1986; Raciborski 1989) provide evidence that the organizers of the elections failed completely to take into account its role in selecting the candidates and then choosing the representatives of the people. Moreover, neither during the municipal elections after the crisis of 1956, nor in 1984 did the citizens know (although the information was readily available) the names of candidates for local council seats, or the programme of the official candidates for their municipalities. In 1984, voters were hardly aware of the role of the local councils in the Polish political system and in solving local problems. They did not know the voting regulations. They considered the Polish electoral system to be rather undemocratic and their own influence on the electoral process non-existent. None the less, the vast majority went to the polls. Moreover, those who went voted mainly in the open, despite the fact that both the law and organizational arrangements gave them the opportunity to vote in private. They came to the polls with their families, just after Sunday mass. The motive they usually gave for voting was the obligation 'to do one's civic duty', which reflected precisely the main electoral slogan used for many years by the authorities.

Others were afraid of the negative consequences of their absence from the polls. Participation in the voting ritual was voluntary, but in the opinion of many their absence would call the authorities' attention to them. It was a holiday, something that happened only once every four years, something that enabled the people to present themselves to their children in the role of political sovereigns. It also communicated to the authorities that a particular person was a loyal citizen who did not oppose the state. Absence from the polls was considered to be not so much abstention as active support for the 'boycott', or at least failing to do one's civic duty.

Therefore, the electoral process, seen from the sides both of the organizers and of the voters, turns out to have been an activity that replaced the sovereignty of the people, not expressed it. The more ceremonial the election process, on the part of both organizers and participants, the less important its original instrumental meaning. The instrumental meaning did not disappear totally, however: the ritual highlighted not the sovereignty of the citizens but their 'objectification'. For those who remembered or who were told about severe discrimination as a result of not

voting in the early 1950s, the election also had an 'instrumental' character: by going to the polls they defended themselves.

The next two examples of the ritualization of public behaviour have no counterparts in Western democracies. Thus, the purpose of these ritualizations cannot be compared with Western examples, but only to the declared aims of the behaviour associated with them.

### *Third Example: Subbotnik*

The third example, then, is the *subbotnik*. This has a long tradition in communist countries, and in the Soviet Union has been organized since 1919 (Lane 1981: 116-19, 212; Smith 1980: 363-401). There were various kinds of *subbotnik* in Poland. I shall discuss only one in this essay, an all-national *subbotnik* organized on the same Sunday throughout the country. Once or twice a year, in the spring or early autumn, millions of factory- and office-workers, voluntarily but with their participation supervised, would work for four hours, producing goods, cleaning, digging the ground, or painting. Factory workers were allowed to use their machines, but office employees had to engage in manual labour. At the end of the day, the value of the work done was calculated. In the evening, the national television news announced the total value and by how much the country was now richer; it also showed the leaders of the state and the Party planting flowers in the capital's botanic gardens. According to the signals sent by the organizers, the *subbotnik* had a double meaning. First of all, it was a kind of economic activity—it contributed to the growth of the nation's wealth. Secondly, as the flags, banners and slogans stressed, it was a ritual act that emphasized the significance of work itself, of the sovereignty of the people giving their labour free during their normal hours of leisure in order to enrich the nation, that is themselves. During periods of economic trouble (in other words, almost always) the *subbotnik* was intended to demonstrate this particularly strongly.

It is a moot question whether or not the *subbotnik* was of real economic importance. Even if everybody worked efficiently during the four-hour period, the fraction of the national product additionally produced would be small and would hardly exceed the cost of flags, banners, transportation of the people involved, and so on. The work was not efficient, however, and everybody was totally aware of this. Even the official newspapers used to stress after each *subbotnik* that there was no economic sense in planting grass or flowers where two days later the excavating machine would dig a hole for the foundation of a building, or in clerks painting a bridge when they did not know how to do it, wasted paint, and so on. So only the symbolic sense remained, but not even the organizers believed that the *subbotnik* added any splendour to work as a value, since they must have known, from experience, its real meaning. This meaning was also known to participants.

This common knowledge resulted in the fact that before each *subbotnik* the mass media would announce that now everything would be much better organized than last time. The *subbotnik* did not call the citizens' attention to economic problems since it added to them, and everybody was aware of it. It did not express the spontaneous willingness of the people to improve the economy, since it was organized from above and participation was checked. In a situation where the people had no chance to influence the economy of their country, but in which their sovereignty was treated officially as a supreme value, a ritual was organized which was to substitute for a while for the real influence. There was, however, an instrumental sense to the *subbotnik*: it forced people to behave as if they recognized an ideological reality as an actual one. In surrendering themselves to the fiction, they gave up their own sovereignty.

As with the May Day celebrations, people often participated in the ritual for reasons other than the fact that it was compulsory. As well as the general, national level of signals, we are dealing here with micro-scale signals: whatever happens with the *subbotnik* on the national level, it may be necessary to lend a hand in our own factory or office. Moreover, during the work or the activity masquerading as work it was possible to talk informally with colleagues or supervisors, to introduce them to the children and the children to them, and the children also to the 'efficiency' of their parents' work. And while the signal on the macro-social level was a fiction, both for senders and receivers, and was transmitted only in order to pay homage to a declared ideology, the signal on the micro-level seems to have been meaningful, and because of that was accepted from time to time.

The economic absurdity of nationwide *subbotnik* generated strong social resistance in the 1970s that resulted in changes in its character. The nationwide *subbotnik* was replaced by the Party *subbotnik*. On the one hand, this was because Party members were more easily mobilized, and on the other the Party itself wanted 'to take pains' to save the economy. Finally, even this ritual did not prove to be either useful or necessary, so it was abandoned.

#### *Fourth Example: Social Consultations*

My last example of the ritualization of collective political behaviour is that of 'social consultations', which emerged in Poland in the 1970s. Since then they have referred to a situation in which the authorities asked the people questions, usually giving also variants of the answer, on public matters considered to be of importance. They were connected mainly with the structure of state-regulated prices, but also covered proposals for certain bills, the voting regulations being an example. Public discussion over these questions was expected but—and this is very important—social consultations did not have the nature of referendums. Nobody counted the votes, and the authorities were not obliged to follow the

results of the consultation. The government's appeal to public opinion, strongly stressed in political speeches and in numerous programmes on state-controlled radio, television and in the press, was intended to prove the sovereignty of the people, whereas the open declaration that the government would do whatever in its own opinion was for the good of society revealed the real power relationships.

Like the *subbotnik*, social consultations might, in a sense, be regarded as instrumental actions. Just as the *subbotnik* might result in the cleaning up of an office or factory, so social consultations might result in corrections being introduced in the authorities' proposals. They could not bring about significant changes, however, and after all, society was not consulted on truly important matters. A typical example of the sort of problem that was offered for public discussion was the need to modify the voting regulations before the national elections in 1985. In the Polish situation, the really important problems were who would be allowed to put up candidates and how, and what the voting rules were to be. The problems actually raised for discussion and widely discussed in the media were, however, the minimum age at which one might become a candidate for a seat in parliament and the number of seats there should be in the house. Both consultants and consulted were well aware of the fact that what was being discussed was of no social significance. For the good of the idea of the sovereignty of the people, however, the discussion continued.

The fact that social consultations were an activity of which the original and obviously undeclared sense was solely symbolic was well demonstrated by two examples of the deritualization of these actions. In June 1976, the Prime Minister declared in parliament that he was putting price rises, the extent of which proved to be enormous, up for consultation. All the parties represented in parliament supported the idea of the rises, as did the parliament itself unanimously. New price-lists were printed and distributed in advance, and the stores were thoroughly prepared for the changes. The social consultation was to last for one day, in other words it was not to exist at all. This only meant that society approved the rises and at the same time confirmed its sovereignty. What is interesting about this example is that society really did confirm its sovereignty, coming out against the rises in a huge wave of strikes and demonstrations, which were brutally suppressed. Ritual was turned into instrumental action, into a real 'consultation', the course and results of which were quite different from those planned by the Prime Minister and parliament. The rises were cancelled by the Prime Minister himself, who on this occasion did not care to discuss the problem with parliament but declared on television that the social consultations had proved that the proposal had been premature.

Another example of social consultation also concerned prices, but its effect was very different. At the very beginning of 1985, the government wanted to raise the prices of food, heating, electricity and so on, and simultaneously to abandon their rationing. The proposal was put to long and varied social consultations, which could be taken to mean that it was a real, instrumental activity. At the end of March 1985, the umbrella organization of 'new' trade unions, which emerged

after the dissolution of Solidarity and the so-called 'old' unions, took the floor and pronounced very strongly against the government's proposals. Simultaneously, underground Solidarity called for a fifteen-minute strike. After direct negotiations between the representatives of the 'new' official unions and the representatives of the government, the authorities declared that they would postpone the rises and modify them. Underground Solidarity called off the strike. The 'new' unions were very proud of their first political success. Two days later the government declared immediate implementation of the first stage of three of the rises. What the government did might have been the result of economic pressure, but that does not change the significance of this social consultation.

The two instances of social consultation discussed here show that their results were not taken into account by those who started them and who made the political decisions. The ritual was carried out only to solve the tension between the Party's monopoly of power and the idea of the sovereignty of the people. The authorities expected the people to accept the symbolic character of the consultation, whose de-ritualization by their participants in a situation that the government was able to handle in a political way, showed very clearly that it was intended to 'objectify' the citizens. The de-ritualization of the consultations by their participants in a situation which the government was *unable* to handle in a political way also showed the intended sense of the ritual. But it transformed itself into the temporary sovereignty of society, though its costs were enormous.

#### *Fifth Example: The 'Red Skullcap'*

Finally, I shall present another, quite different example of the substitutive ritualization of public behaviour. In 1981, when certain Solidarity leaders thought that they were on the verge of taking over real power, but that for geopolitical reasons the thesis of the leading role of the Communist Party could not formally be challenged, the idea of the 'red skullcap' emerged. According to this idea, real power would be in the hands of a new house of parliament controlled by Solidarity, but to give the impression that the Party still played a leading role the existing house (with its permanent Party majority) would be retained, with only a limited, purely ceremonial role. The red Communist skullcap would 'decorate' the real power structure. Political ritual connected with the activities of the Party would replace its real significance.

*Conclusions*

I have discussed in this article a few examples of ritualized collective behaviour. It is now necessary to remind readers of the actions of the authorities and of the organizers of the rituals. Quite often, they openly demanded certain kinds of behaviour but did not actually penalize those who deviated beyond certain limits tacitly drawn by the authorities. We can interpret this situation by using at least two theories that may be true in different contexts. According to the first, the behaviour of the authorities was both instrumental and realistic. They were aware of the fact that it was impossible to enforce the homogeneity of human reactions and so aimed merely at maximum possible compliance. According to the second theory, their behaviour was first of all ritualistic: they presented unrealistic demands in order to satisfy their ideology rather than to obtain total obedience.

According to the thesis presented above, many public actions have much more of a ritual than an instrumental character. I have put forward several examples taken from Polish political life that could be interpreted as instrumental actions, but which were in fact symbolic. They were standardized and formalized actions, giving an impression of how, in the opinion of their organizers, things should be and what the social order should look like, related to the sphere of supreme values, to the sphere of the sacred. They were, then, rituals in the sense given in the introduction to this article. The ritual character of these actions depends not so much on granting a special significance to the instrumental aspects of actions as on providing a substitute for their original instrumental meaning.

Two examples, one at the beginning of the article taken from Great Britain and one at the end taken from the Poland of 1981, show that the problem does not have to be communist-inspired. All the examples discussed in this article show that explanations for such situations should be sought in attempts to achieve a symbolic reduction of the tension between two sacred concepts of social order, simultaneously declared as untouchable, that are in real life incompatible. We could even speak of an attempt to reduce tension between two cultural systems that are different but exist at the same time in the same country. It is also possible to try to interpret the ritualization of political behaviour within the framework of sociological role theory. Most people play different social roles simultaneously, and in many cases it is impossible to meet the demands of all of them. Several ways of coping with this sort of conflict have been presented (see, for example, Goode 1960, Kahn *et al.* 1964). To reduce tensions in playing multiple roles, ritualization of a less important but otherwise necessary social role may be suggested as a way of coping with it.

In dealing with the types of ritualization of collective social behaviour discussed above, I would agree with Malinowski (1931) that the genesis of rituals may be tied to the fact that humans are periodically faced with important tasks or crises where knowledge and skills provide little assurance of success. It would, however, be difficult not to agree with Radcliffe-Brown (1952: 148-9), according to whom: 'if it were not for the existence of the rite and the beliefs associated with

it the individuals would feel no anxiety...the psychological effect of the rite is to create in them a sense of insecurity and danger'. This second aspect of the situation has not been dealt with in this essay, but its significance is demonstrated by the examples of attempts to deritualize certain behaviour and to reduce tension by total subordination to the dominating political system.

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REVIEW ARTICLE

**SELECTIVE NATURALIZATION:  
W. G. RUNCIMAN'S SOCIAL THEORY**

MALCOLM BULL

W. G. RUNCIMAN, *A Treatise on Social Theory*, Volume I: *The Methodology of Social Theory*, Cambridge etc.: Cambridge University Press 1988. xii, 341 pp., Index. £12.50/\$19.95.

W. G. RUNCIMAN, *A Treatise on Social Theory*, Volume II: *Substantive Social Theory*, Cambridge etc.: Cambridge University Press 1989. xiii, 450 pp., References, Index. £12.95/\$18.95.

W. G. RUNCIMAN, *Confessions of a Reluctant Theorist: Selected Essays of W. G. Runciman*, New York etc.: Harvester Wheatsheaf 1989. vii, 248 pp., Index. £30.00.

I

THE history of anthropology has rarely paralleled that of its occasionally indistinguishable twin, sociology, and so it is not altogether surprising that at a time when anthropological theory is widely considered to lack vitality and direction, sociological theory is enjoying a renaissance. No sooner had Jeffrey Alexander reviewed the 'tired' state of the subject in his four-volume *Theoretical Logic in Sociology* (1982a, 1982b, 1983, 1984), than two sociologists began

publishing works that set out to rival the all-encompassing theories of the discipline's founding fathers: one volume of Michael Mann's projected three-volume *Sources of Social Power* (1986) has thus far appeared as well as the two volumes of Runciman's projected three-volume *Treatise on Social Theory* under review here. Both authors are trying to develop a general theory of social change through the course of world history. The likelihood of an anthropologist attempting something on this scale (say a new *Golden Bough*) seems so remote that it is worth asking to what the relative vigour of sociological theory is to be attributed. Is it the result of the refusal to be diverted from the study of social structure into the blind alley of cultural interpretation, or is it simply indicative of a failure to learn from the over-confidence of previous generations?

Of the two theorists, Runciman is the one whose work is likely to be of greater interest to anthropologists. Not only are his intellectual range and ambitions the more extensive, but, since he perceives no essential difference between the two disciplines, he specifically includes the methods and data of anthropology within what is primarily a sociological study. However, as the title essay of the collection *Confessions of a Reluctant Theorist* reveals, Runciman cuts an unusual figure in academic life, let alone sociology. His formal training in the subject is limited (to one semester at Columbia and one at Berkeley), and he has long combined his academic pursuits with a career in the family shipping business, of which he is now the chairman. He has been spared the need to seek professional advancement or to do more than occasional teaching, and, to judge from the first two volumes of the *Treatise* (which have been cleared of intra-disciplinary reference in order to exhibit the author's remarkable familiarity with the literature of history, both ancient and modern), it is his undergraduate education as a classicist and historian that has left the more lasting impression. It somehow seems fitting that he, like Frazer, should be writing his *magnum opus* as a senior research fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge.

In the *Confessions*, Runciman states that it was when 'names such as Foucault, Habermas and Ricoeur were starting to appear on Anglophone reading lists' and sociology was 'disappearing under a cloud of increasingly acrimonious methodological disputation' that he realized he would have to write a theoretical work establishing the identity and integrity of the discipline (*Confessions*, p. 5). However, the *Treatise* reveals no interest in the new forms of Marxism, hermeneutics, and systems theory that have set the tone of theoretical discussion in the intervening period. The best (and most charitable) way to interpret this omission, is to see the mid-1960s, not as the point at which Runciman began grappling with critical theory, but as the time at which he withdrew from the debate to survey the evidence for which all social theories must account—the historical development of human societies. His unwillingness to engage with contemporary theory significantly reduces the immediate relevance of many of his arguments, but it also means that the *Treatise* has a curiously timeless (or at least nineteenth-century) quality. In its historical and geographical range, and in its close attention to detail, it surpasses anything written since Weber, and if this is

achieved at the cost of self-imposed blindness to the insights of other theorists, so be it. Grand theories need a lot of facts, and Runciman is exceptional in having historical knowledge commensurate with his theoretical ambitions. For this reason alone, the *Treatise* deserves serious attention.

## II

The first volume of the *Treatise* deals not with history but with methodology. It addresses the long-standing controversy about whether there is 'a fundamental difference in kind between the sciences of nature and the sciences of man' (*Treatise I*, p. 1). It is not a debate in which natural scientists take much part, but for the social scientist interest in the question is fuelled by status anxiety. As Runciman puts it: 'the twentieth-century social scientist, whatever his views on the scope and nature of his subject, cannot help being driven by the relative paucity of his results to the fear that he may be forever excluded from the enchanted garden in which the fruit of the tree of knowledge can be seen hanging so much closer within reach' (*ibid.*). The object of the first volume of the *Treatise* is to clear the way to this epistemological paradise.

Runciman assumes that there is a valid distinction to be made between science and non-science, and argues that social science (by which he means the consubstantial trinity of sociology, anthropology and history) is a genuine example of the former, albeit one that has developed in 'methodological subordination to the sciences of nature' (*ibid.*). He quickly dismisses the objection that he fails to make any distinction between nature and culture, or to allow for the limitations of cultural relativity, and proceeds to what he considers to be the major problem: the fact that the data of social science include behaviour that has meaning to the agents. The social scientist is obliged not only to account for human behaviour but to understand it, and this, Runciman concedes, involves 'the risk of a category of mistakes which his colleagues in natural science will never have the occasion to make' (*Treatise I*, p. 15). But, 'the meaningfulness of behaviour does not render it inexplicable...[for] the additional difficulty it raises is not to do with explanation' (*ibid.*). There is, he argues, 'no special problem of explanation in the human sciences...only a special problem of description' (*Treatise I*, p. 1).

The whole of the first volume is devoted to the distinction that underlies this conclusion. According to Runciman, there are three types of understanding: those involved in reportage, explanation, and (in a special sense of the word) description. Although all are interwoven in a complete account of a given social phenomenon, Runciman claims that the three are logically distinct and methodologically separable, both from one another and from the fourth activity proper to the social scientist—evaluation. Reportage, the primary level of understanding, involves the identification of words, actions, events and intentions in such a way that the report

can be accepted as factual by rival observers from different theoretical schools; explanation, the secondary level, is the claim that a reported event or state came about because and only because of some antecedent event or state of affairs; description, the tertiary level, conveys an accurate impression of what it is like for those involved in a given situation, and evaluation is the process by which the researcher passes judgement on the success or failure of social action and assesses its moral, political, aesthetic or religious desirability. This fourfold classification allows Runciman to assert the value-freedom of social-scientific enquiry while at the same time acknowledging that the researcher may legitimately make value-judgements, and enables him to steer a course 'between the Scylla of positivistic empiricism and the Charybdis of phenomenological hermeneutics' (*Treatise I*, p. 144) by placating the former with his account of explanation, and the latter with his account of description. Needless to say, there is always a suspicion that Runciman is trying to have everything both ways, and the chief interest of the volume lies in his (not altogether successful) attempt to make his definitions of reportage, explanation, description and evaluation both internally coherent and mutually independent.

Regarding reportage, Runciman accepts the maxim 'no observations without presuppositions', but denies that the resulting report will necessarily contain any explanatory or evaluative bias. Provided that a report can be transposed *salve veritate* into the terms of a rival observer of a different theoretical persuasion, there is no problem. Alongside the rival observer, Runciman introduces another hypothetical figure, a "recording angel" [who] is supposed to have been present at and throughout whatever event, process or state of affairs is under discussion, but to have brought to it no explanatory, descriptive or evaluative presuppositions of any kind' (*Treatise I*, p. 96). An accurate, theory-neutral report is thus one that is acceptable to a rival observer in his own terms, and which corresponds to the recording angel's videotapes of the event. Runciman is aware that this account will not convince the sceptic, but his concerns are methodological, not philosophical. Even so, his attempt to show that successful reportage can be less than objective but more than consensual appears to be misconceived, for he seems merely to have shifted the problem to another level. The recording angel may have no explanatory, descriptive or evaluative presuppositions, but he must have some presuppositions in order to observe. A theory-neutral videotape library will not be a single presuppositionless record of events, but a comprehensive library of films taken by every possible means from every possible perspective. A rival observer may not only favour different explanatory theories, he may also have different views on data-gathering. If so, he will not only report differently, but also observe differently, and although his reports can be falsified by the recording angel's archive (in so far as they do not correspond to what has been observed), his observations cannot.

The difficulties caused by this anomaly are highlighted by Runciman's account of explanation. He distinguishes between explanatory theories and theoretical presuppositions on the grounds that the former can be disconfirmed by some

specified observation or set of observations, whereas the latter are untestable. However, the distinction is not absolute, for disconfirmation through observation can only take place within shared observational presuppositions, some of which may be theoretical. Runciman might protest that the objection is irrelevant, since it applies equally to scientific enquiry, and his sole concern is to show that social science operates in the same way as other sciences. But the spread of opinion in the social sciences is far greater than in the natural, and the measure of agreement about how, what, or how long to observe, far less. Runciman claims that the recording angel 'is not to be taken merely to embody the lowest common methodological denominator of...rival Behaviourist, Structuralist, Phenomenological, Marxian, Durkheimian, Weberian, Utilitarian or other schools' (*Treatise I*, p. 99), yet this is precisely what the angel will have to be if his role is to be of any value at all.

Runciman notes that 'every person capable of primary understanding of what other people say and do is capable of some degree of tertiary understanding simply by virtue of the faculty of imagination with which all human beings are endowed' (*Treatise I*, p. 226). But he does not see that the primary understanding of human actions is often impossible without tertiary understanding. Although the identification of actions does not usually require any knowledge of how it feels to be a particular agent in a specific cultural context, it does involve some awareness of what it is like to be an agent, and of what it might be like to perform the action in question. Without such knowledge it is difficult to ascribe motives, and thus to identify actions correctly. (As it stands, anyone writing a report on Runciman's principles would produce something like Craig Raine's poem 'A Martian Sends a Post-Card Home'.) The attempt to separate reportage and description may be misguided, but Runciman's discussion of the latter remains interesting because he there allows for many difficulties passed over in his account of the former. He tacitly acknowledges the distinction between reportage and observation by dividing misdescription into mystification (suppression, exaggeration and ethnocentricity) and misapprehension (incompleteness, oversimplification and ahistoricity). He also concedes to agents what he does not permit observers, namely 'a fundamentally privileged position in describing what their experiences are like' (*Treatise I*, p. 226), allows that 'no two authentic, well-grounded descriptions are ever incompatible' (*Treatise I*, p. 295), and suggests that 'the only test of their value is their capacity to enlarge the reader's tertiary understanding of what the experience was like in such a way that those who had the experience could in principle be brought to agree that it does' (*Treatise I*, p. 272).

If the distinction between reportage and description is untenable, the claim that 'there is no special problem of explanation in the human sciences' is undermined, and with it the basis for Runciman's argument that the methodology of the social sciences is conformable to that of the natural sciences. However, his contention that reportage and explanation are independent of evaluation remains intact. On this topic (as, of course, implicitly in the previous discussion) Runciman's starting-point is Weberian. In an earlier work, *A Critique of Max Weber's Philosophy of*

*Social Science* (Runciman 1972), he dwelt at length on Weber's 'confusion between theoretical presuppositions and judgements of value' (ibid.: 61), pointing out that while the presuppositions of sociological research are value-relevant in so far as they relate to values, they are not necessarily derived from the values of the researcher in anything other than the trivial sense (true also of research in the natural sciences) that research usually presupposes values such as the value of validity. In the *Treatise*, Runciman restates this argument with the additional claim that the human sciences can be considered less than value-free 'only if it is the case that every observation statement about human behaviour logically entails, or is entailed by, some value-judgement' (*Treatise I*, p. 8). This is an absurdly over-restrictive formulation—the human sciences are not composed of isolated observation-statements but (to use Runciman's phrase) 'precise and plausible hypotheses [grounded] in strong and surprising theories' (*Treatise I*, p. 180)—and it would be fairer to say that, in practice, social science is evaluative only if its hypotheses (not, it should be noted, its theories) are implausible except when taken in conjunction with a contested value-judgement. However, even by this more inclusive criterion, the value-freedom that Runciman claims for the social scientist remains a possibility, for some (admittedly low-level) hypotheses do seem to be attractive to researchers irrespective of their theoretical orientation, political persuasion or cultural identity.

### III

From the brief critical summary given above, it may be difficult to see why it takes Runciman three hundred and fifty pages to define four words. So, before turning to the second volume of the *Treatise*, it is necessary to say something about the unusual style in which both volumes are written. Runciman, who aspires to give an exhaustive treatment of his subject, enumerates the possible variants of each term at every step in his argument. This practice imparts to the text an air of pedantry that is not dispelled by the extraordinary range of historical and literary examples with which the author attempts to enliven it. As a result, the lucidity that characterized his earlier books and essays has been lost, and the *Treatise* often reads, not like the work of a literate sociologist, but like a legal document interspersed with transcripts from BBC Radio 4's 'Round Britain Quiz'.

Although accurately described as 'a test of fortitude' (Giddens 1990: 41), reading the second volume is, none the less, rewarding. Runciman's 'substantive social theory' is a remarkable attempt to bring within a single theoretical framework the analysis of every society in every period of world history. His basic premise is that 'the study of societies is the study of people in roles, and the study of people in roles is the study of the institutional distribution of power' (*Treatise II*, p. 3). Power, which is defined as 'the capacity of persons to affect

through either inducements or sanctions what is thought, felt, said or done by other persons, subject to that capacity deriving from the possession of institutional, not personal attributes' (*Treatise II*, p. 2), is said to come in only three basic forms: economic, ideological, and coercive. A society can be pictured as an inverted pyramid in which the apex (at the base) represents the zero-point, and the three upturned corners the purest forms, of power in each dimension. Each point in the pyramid is a person in a role; groups of people, who have 'by virtue of their roles a distinguishable and more than transiently similar location and, on that account, a common interest' (*Treatise II*, p. 20), constitute systacts (a neologism that Runciman uses to cover orders, estates, classes, status-groups, castes, factions, age-sets and the like). The social structure of a society can thus be characterized by the identity and location of systacts within the inverted pyramid of power.

This analysis of structure synthesizes Weberian and Marxist themes in a fashion more elegant than original. The novelty of Runciman's approach derives from his encounter with Darwin, and becomes evident only when the discussion moves from social structure to social change. He contends that 'the history of any chosen society has...to be narrated as an evolving range of alternative modes of the distribution of power within an evolving set of constraints' (*Treatise II*, p. 40). Societies thus evolve through a process of social selection in which practices (described as 'functionally defined units of reciprocal action informed by the mutually recognized intentions and beliefs of designated persons about their respective capacity to influence each other's behaviour by virtue of their roles' (*Treatise II*, p. 41)) that confer a competitive advantage on the systacts which carry them, are selected for survival. The parallels with biological evolution are roughly as follows: practices/genes, roles/organisms, power/reproductive capacity, systacts/groups, societies/species. So, to work out his theory of social evolution, Runciman has to take on the roles of Linnaeus, Darwin and Mendel: he has to produce a taxonomy of human societies; specify the process by which one has evolved from another; and identify the practices that determine both continuity and change.

The taxonomy is derived from a consideration of the possible combinations of the different types of economic, coercive and ideological power. According to Runciman, there are 448 such combinations, of which about a dozen have been actualized. They comprise: (at the stage before statehood) societies in which power is limited (hunter-gatherers), dissipated ('big-men' and their equivalents), shared (a non-sovereign oligarchy), and obstructed (a non-sovereign 'monarchy'); (at the pre-industrial stage) patrimonial, citizen, warrior, bureaucratic, feudal and bourgeois states; and (at the industrial stage) capitalist, socialist and authoritarian nation-states. Most of the second volume is devoted to a description of the types and an analysis of the sub-types and variants. Discussion of the patterns of evolution and the mechanisms of change is therefore left to a final chapter that, although it enumerates a variety of processes by which change takes place and examines a few test-cases, is not the grand evolutionary history of human societies in which the project should culminate.

Runciman, who began the first volume of the *Treatise* with the promise of a return to Eden, ends the second with the claim that his theory is 'no less demonstrably superior to its rivals than Darwin's was' (*Treatise II*, p. 449). The failure to work out the specifically evolutionary part of the theory means that this judgement is more than a little premature. Runciman might claim that all the conceptual apparatus is in place, and that it only requires someone with more time and comparable historical erudition to complete the task. (He is not planning to do the job himself—the projected third volume is to be an analysis of twentieth-century England.) But it is by no means certain that anyone is likely to bother. There have already been several inauspicious attempts to unite sociology with Darwinism, and although Runciman (with his distinction between the explanatory and the evaluative) is at pains to point out that his theory has no ethical or political bias, its evolutionary structure remains problematic. The most obvious source of difficulty is the fact that the analogies with biological evolution are frequently misleading. For example, Runciman assumes that 'the agents of social change cannot themselves be understood (in the secondary, explanatory sense) as the outcome of social selection any more than the agents of genetic change as the outcome of natural selection', and so concludes that 'the social theorist can and must treat the emergence of variants as random' (*Treatise II*, p. 42). However useful it may be for the biologist to think of mutation as random, there seems no reason why the social theorist should consider the mutation of practices 'independently caused and therefore explicable only at a different level' (*ibid.*). Unlike genes, practices stand in a constitutive (as well as causative) relation to the data, and to disavow interest in their variability is to exclude much of what social science usually purports to explain.

The false analogy between genes and practices also informs Runciman's view that 'practices are selected not for their own attributes, but as attributes of their carriers' (*Treatise II*, p. 46). On this premise, the selection of practices takes place only through the selection of roles (and systacts). But practices are independent of their carriers in a way that genes are not, and may, as the result of imitation, be reproduced in a systact (or society) other than that in which they were previously carried. Runciman does not allow for the possibility that the conquerors may adopt the practices of the conquered, or that one society may simply attempt to replicate the structure of another. (For example, the recent shift from a socialist to a liberal-democratic system in Eastern Europe is not usefully explained in terms of the random variability of the practices of state socialism, yet Runciman, who is committed to the position that social change takes place through the competitive selection of pre-existing practices, would have to offer some such explanation.) Furthermore, the selection of practices is not only independent of the selection of systacts, but the selection of systacts is at least partially independent of the selection of practices, for the reproduction of a systact may perpetuate some (vestigial) practices that do not confer a competitive advantage but are simply carried along with those that do.

It is, however, the awkward parallel between a society and a species that reveals most clearly the inadequacy of Runciman's evolutionary theory. For those who (unlike the present reviewer) possess the historical knowledge necessary to appreciate their relevance, one of the delights of Runciman's second volume must be his willingness to make comparisons between societies of widely differing historical and geographical locations (for example, eleventh-century England is first compared to twentieth-century Sweden (*Treatise II*, p. 145) and then classified with Hammurabi's Babylonia (*Treatise II*, pp. 239ff.)). Some of these comparisons may be peculiarly apposite, but it seems as though Runciman has forgotten that human beings transform their environments, and that while the creatures of a single species retain their genetic identity wherever or whenever they are found, the character of a society does not depend solely on its internal power structure; it is also fundamentally altered by technological advances, and by changes in its position relative to other societies and states (cf. Adams 1977: 399). Although acknowledged in the distinction between industrial and pre-industrial societies, Runciman does not otherwise allow for ecological factors in his classification: he thus categorizes both post-Carolingian Europe and post-colonial Latin America as feudal societies, as though the invention of printing made no significant difference to the structure of ideological power, or the invention of gunpowder to coercive power, or the industrialization of other parts of the world to the exercise of economic power.

Given the results, one wonders whether Runciman's taxonomy serves any purpose. The benefit of taxonomy in the biological sciences is that it reduces a profusion of organisms to a more manageable number of relatively uniform species. Human history offers nothing like the same variety of social arrangements, and each society can quite easily be studied individually. Moreover, since the study of history is already well advanced, it is by no means clear that the addition of an evolutionary framework adds very much to what is already known, or substantially alters the way in which existing information is interpreted. The impact of evolutionary theory in biology derived from its capacity to create a plausible narrative for natural history, but, since no one imagines that societies are immutable, or that competition is not a factor in social change, an evolutionary theory of human history is not a radical innovation, except when it incorporates some evaluative or teleological premise of the kind that Runciman eschews.

Compared with Darwin, Runciman explains little; compared with Marx and Weber, his work lacks mythopoeic power. Social theory can inspire as well as explain, but nowhere in the *Treatise* does one detect the voice of prophecy struggling with the language of science. Runciman has no vision of the future, no nostalgia for the past, and little sympathy with the human struggle he describes; all he has to offer is the conviction that his theory has such explanatory potential that it should effect a Darwinian revolution in the social sciences. The imperturbable urbanity of the *Treatise* does not conceal compelling insights; if it disguises anything, it is the extraordinary ambition of its 'reluctant' author.

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## DISORIENTATIONS: PART FOUR

P. A. LIENHARDT

(Edited with an introduction by Ahmed Al-Shahi)

### *Introduction*

THIS final part of 'Disorientations' introduces two themes: the traditional economic system of Kuwait and the institution of government. Before the discovery of oil, trade, seafaring and pearl-fishing were the main economic activities, necessitating moral responsibility and mutual obligations among the people engaged in them. Risks, profits and losses were shared. With the invention of cultured pearls, pearl-fishing declined, but the associated mercantile values of confidence and reputation continued to operate in Kuwait's business sector. Business is conducted on the strength of family relations, and a family's honour depends on its members' adherence to the financial and moral responsibilities discussed here by Peter Lienhardt. While the shaikhs maintained law and order, the merchants made the wealth of Kuwait, some of the latter even becoming richer and more generous than the shaikhs. The alliance between the shaikhs and the merchants has been the bedrock of Kuwait's stability and prosperity.

This is the fourth and final part of Peter Lienhardt's 'Disorientations', the manuscript of which he was working on at the time of his death in 1986. It is prefaced here with an introduction by Ahmed Al-Shahi who has edited the typescript for publication. The text of 'Part Four' follows on directly from 'Part Three' which appeared in an earlier issue of *JASO* (Vol. XXII, no. 1, pp. 3-18), as did 'Part Two' (Vol. XXI, no. 3, pp. 251-67). The first part was published in Ahmed Al-Shahi (ed.), *The Diversity of the Muslim Community: Anthropological Essays in Memory of Peter Lienhardt* (London: Ithaca Press, for the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies, 1987). For further information concerning the background to the publication of 'Disorientations' see Ahmed Al-Shahi's introduction to 'Part Two' (*JASO*, Vol. XXI, no. 3, pp. 251-3).

As the merchants played their role in running the economy, the shaikhs maintained the political structure, based on the bedouin model of tribal leadership. Kuwaitis obeyed the shaikhs and participated in government through the institution of the *majlis*, a daily public audience with the shaikhs, who dealt with local affairs, legal cases, requests and grievances. Through this system the shaikhs remained accessible and acceptable to their subjects. This is in marked contrast to many other Middle Eastern countries where rulers were (and are) hardly accessible or accountable to their subjects.

As Peter Lienhardt explains, just before the Second World War the power of the shaikhs came to be questioned by a group of Kuwaitis. This group advocated the establishment of a regular court of justice, a measure of control over state revenues, and some popular representation in the government. Subsequently, demands for such measures led to the shaikhs consenting to the establishment of a parliament. Relationships between the shaikhs and parliament were not easy, resulting in the suspension and later reopening of parliament on a number of occasions. The demands for reform (which later came to be known as the movement for democracy) were not intended to remove the shaikhs, but rather to reform the system of government and to modify the power and authority of the shaikhs.

A more serious threat to Kuwait's political institution, wealth and stability came from its northern neighbour, Iraq. On a number of occasions, Iraq claimed sovereignty over Kuwait and threatened to occupy the country. Peter Lienhardt was not to know that this would become a reality on 2 August 1990 when Iraqi forces occupied Kuwait. The horrors of this occupation—destruction of the infrastructure, executions, torture, rape and looting—are well known. The international community reacted with outrage to this aggression as the violation of the sovereignty of an independent state. In March 1991, with the support of a number of United Nations resolutions, the Allied Forces recaptured Kuwait. The final act of destruction committed by the retreating Iraqi forces was to set ablaze the oil wells that constituted the country's main economic resource. Iraq also suffered considerable losses to its army, economic infrastructure, communications and financial assets, and it has become isolated internationally. Peter Lienhardt would have been saddened to see the destruction and turmoil that has followed the invasion and recapture of Kuwait. Once a peaceful and wealthy country, Kuwait now has to rebuild its infrastructure and oil production at considerable cost and over many years to come.

While Kuwait is likely to regenerate its economy, given its large financial reserves, the social and political consequences will be far-reaching. New alliances among Arab and Western countries have developed, and enmities between formerly friendly countries developed. The immigrant population in Kuwait, which Peter Lienhardt discusses in 'Disorientations', has become subject to scrutiny and recrimination, and Kuwait has been criticized for its treatment of some of the immigrant groups after the re-occupation. In particular, the Palestinians, who were accused of supporting the Iraqi invasion, have been the first immigrant group to encounter hostility and maltreatment. It will be very difficult to recreate the

working relationships between the Kuwaitis and the immigrant groups and between the Kuwaitis and the shaikhs that existed prior to the invasion.

The state of emergency declared by the Kuwaiti government after the liberation was seen by some Kuwaitis as an attempt to consolidate the power of the shaikhs. Moreover, those Kuwaitis who were advocating a more democratic and liberal form of government have been strengthened in their demands since the recapture. It remains to be seen whether the ruling family will come to terms with these demands.

In 'Disorientations' Peter Lienhardt provided a valuable source of information and analysis about Kuwait as he saw it in the early 1950s. His knowledge and understanding of the complexity of Kuwaiti society and his command of the Arabic language have resulted in a rare and novel piece of anthropological research. The imagination and depth of understanding shown in 'Disorientations' have been paralleled only rarely in anthropological writings. Researchers on the Gulf States in general and Kuwait in particular will find 'Disorientations' vital reading and a valuable work of reference.

Peter Lienhardt would have been pleased to see 'Disorientations' published in its entirety, as, with the appearance of this fourth and final part, it now has. I have made only minor editorial changes to the text and should like to thank Godfrey Lienhardt for his help and suggestions concerning them. I should also like to thank the editors of *JASO* for making possible the publication in full of 'Disorientations'.

AHMED AL-SHAHI

Like so many of the polite, friendly Palestinians who thronged the cafés of Kuwait in the evenings, playing dominoes or chatting to the background of Arabic love songs on the radio, the schoolteachers in Failaka carried within them the savage embitterment of the 1948 war, in which they had lost their home. In Kuwait, Palestinians had taken a little time to become outspoken, but, perhaps because of their isolation in the village, the schoolteachers in Failaka showed less self-restraint. Their good humour was no more than a meniscus, and once it gave way there was no pleasing them short of a total commitment, not only to their cause but to their own representation of its world context. Understandably but uncomfortably, a foreigner's 'dispassionateness' was for them, at best, culpable prejudice and, at worst, a callous insult. When the teachers invited me home, I soon found that to them I represented the nation which had taken their country, by an act of imperialism cloaked in an international mandate, and had then abandoned it to the Israelis. As an Englishman, I was not allowed to absolve myself of personal

responsibility for the Balfour Declaration. I might well deplore it personally, but for the teachers it remained part of my national guilt, entirely consistent with what my country was still doing. The Palestinians blamed the Americans, as supporters of Israel, as much as the British. One of the schoolteachers said that America did not rightly belong to the Americans and that they ought to give it back to the 'blacks' who were the indigenous inhabitants. The tragedy of losing his homeland, blamed on 'colonialism' (or 'imperialism', for they are the same word in Arabic), thus extended itself into consonant interpretations of the rights and wrongs of the rest of the world, and to self-identification with causes that he saw as similar to his own. As the discussion became excited, one of the teachers took out a knife, passed his thumb along the blade and said, 'I am keeping this sharp for when we get back home.'

Though they visited the governor, the schoolteachers did not mix much with other people in the village. They could scarcely have been expected to absorb themselves in local life, talking seriously to people who were uninformed about what were, for them, elementary things. I myself was asked quite frequently, 'Is London an island; how far is it away from England?' and, once, 'How many donkeys are there in London?' (A Kuwaiti said I should have replied, 'About six million.') Those who asked such questions were no more knowledgeable about Palestine. If, through education, the teachers had risen up from being peasants at home, how could they be expected to go down again so quickly and join fishermen abroad? It was not that they seemed vain or lacked good intentions. But in Failaka they were not local boys made good, and the gaps in knowledge of the uneducated were not the same as those they might have taken for granted at home—had they had a home. Here, all they had was their education.

Though no scholars, many of the men of Failaka had, in fact, seen a lot of the world as sailors; but, as such, their travels had naturally taken them in a quite different direction from the great Arab centres of the Levant. They had travelled down the Gulf and out into the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean. They had manned local boats carrying Basra dates to Bombay and bringing mangrove poles from Tanzania. A few had joined the pearl-fishing in Ceylon. In this working life, the Arabs of Basra, Bahrain and Dubai were familiar neighbours, whereas even Baghdad was strange and vastly more foreign.

In their trading voyages, the sailors of the Gulf had followed a trade route of even greater antiquity than anyone knew at the time. Not long after I left Failaka, archaeologists came to excavate the tumuli locally known as the 'graves' of the holy men Sa'd and Sa'id and other sites on the island. Their contents proved to date to about 2300 BC and, linking up with what was found on other archaeological sites down the Gulf, provided conclusive evidence of a trade route connecting the Indus Valley civilization of Mohenjo Daro and Harappa with the Mesopotamian civilization of Ur, half a millennium before King Hammurabi of Babylon.

The Egyptian schoolmasters were in Kuwait to earn a living and they were performing an essential service for the country. The few Kuwaitis who were qualified to teach had plenty of more important, or more profitable, work. If the

Egyptians' attitudes to Kuwaiti life were biased, that was simply the effect of differences of upbringing and environment, an encapsulation that was obviously nothing to blame them for personally. After doing an honest daily job of teaching, they could scarcely be expected to spend their spare time in self-questioning. Such self-questioning was, however, an essential part of anthropology. Before trying anything more ambitious, an anthropologist had to do his best to appreciate local situations in local terms, and the unconscious assumptions that the fieldworker had brought with him from home were recognized to be the most subtle obstacle that stood in the way.

One thing that an Egyptian and an English background had in common, however remotely, was an idea of status and power that referred back to land ownership—whether in Egypt or England, what would the aristocracies and the royal families have been during the course of history without vast land holdings? The most natural way for anyone with an English background to envisage the shaikhs of the Gulf states was as little royal families practising a pre-constitutional form of government; and yet the essential lever of power and status, the agricultural land, was a thing that Kuwait did not have. Admittedly, by now the ruler of Kuwait had a lever even stronger than land ownership, since he, or he and his family between them, had the total disposal of the country's oil revenues, but this was a recent situation, far too new to have formed the Kuwaiti people's idea of the shaikhs, or the shaikhs' idea of themselves. To have the whole income of the country centralized in the hands of the government—one socialist ideal achieved by other than socialist means—was at least an economic revolution. The government now distributed the wealth, but what of the times when the government's income had had to be extracted from the people, the time when the Kuwaitis' ideas of political proportions had developed?

The schoolteacher who had taken me out in a bus with his pupils was an Egyptian. Afterwards, we went home and met some of his colleagues. These Egyptians were all happy that theirs was the first Arab country to overthrow a corrupt monarchy and privileged class and to reform the distribution of wealth. None of them was uninterested in politics. They did not talk in front of me about the distribution of wealth in Kuwait, but one, who had been a member of the Muslim Brotherhood in Cairo, had fled to Kuwait to avoid arrest after a political assassination in the days of King Farouq. The Egyptians were not unhappy in Kuwait, but they still missed Egypt and the Egyptian way of life. They joked about their troubles with Kuwaiti Arabic, as when one of them had used the colloquial Egyptian word when asking for bread in a shop and had been given rice instead. 'Rice' was what the word meant in what he regarded as the somewhat barbarous Arabic of the Gulf.

Like all the educated Arab immigrants I met, from whatever country, the Egyptians claimed that the Arabic of their own country was purer than that of any other. Had they tried, they could have found an obvious case of linguistic relativism in the joke about rice. The word that caused the trouble, '*aish*', basically means 'life'. In Egypt, the staple food has always been bread, whereas the Gulf

imports rice as its staple cereal; which would seem to explain why 'the staff of life' is bread in one country and rice in the other.

There was a further situation to which, ideally, the joke about rice and bread should have drawn attention, but which I perceived only after giving a good deal more thought to the bearing of ecology on the traditional politics of the Gulf. The fact that corn grew plentifully in Egypt, whereas rice, even though it held a comparable position as a staple food, had to be imported into Kuwait from far outside the Gulf, marked a deep contrast in background between the Kuwaitis and almost all of their Arab immigrants, though it was a contrast of which neither party seemed to be fully aware. All the countries from which the non-Gulf immigrants came had large peasant populations, whereas Kuwait had none—a little oasis like Jahra was not enough to produce a peasantry. Throughout history, the life of Middle Eastern peasants had been dominated by landlords, aristocracies and political bosses, and there had been no escape. Short of abandoning what assets they had and becoming landless labourers elsewhere—no happy fate—the peasants had to put up with their lot. This peasant experience still influenced the political assumptions of the Arab immigrants, but Kuwaitis had no peasant experience in their background. No Kuwaiti, of whatever class, had ever been completely tied down to Kuwait, and the traditional way of life there had left people much more scope for resisting tyranny and exploitation. When they could not fight oppression they could move away from it, taking their means of livelihood, their boats, with them. Thus, what the Egyptian schoolteachers were proud their people had overthrown by overthrowing Farouq was a system involving inequalities that Kuwaitis had never experienced to anything like that degree. And this was not just a thing of the past. There were not many Middle Eastern countries, whether right-wing or left-wing, which, like Kuwait, had no secret police.

Even the question of jokes themselves may be relevant here. In my experience, the two most jocular countries of the Middle East are Iran and Egypt. These are also the two countries with the most consistent history of peasant oppression. Jokes are safer than straight criticism. In Kuwait, where people were not particularly jocular, anyone would quite readily and frankly criticize anyone else to his face. So long as the expressions used were not downright insulting, honest criticism was not classed with aggression.

There is no doubt that many of the Egyptians and other immigrant Arabs at that time did regard themselves as metropolitan and the Kuwaitis as provincial. At home, the Kuwaitis could easily shrug off such attitudes—the immigrants were only their employees.<sup>1</sup> But when Kuwaitis visited Cairo, as many did now that

1. Nor were all the English expatriates beyond criticism. An elderly Kuwaiti took me out in his car, calling on an English doctor to pick up some medicine, and the doctor detained his patient with a long account of some personal arrangement that he found unsatisfactory. When we were back in the car, the Kuwaiti, stammering with indignation, said, 'You see what it's like here. We pay them high salaries, charge them no tax, supply them with free houses and free furniture and everything, right down to the toilet-paper, and still they complain.'

they were rich, or went to study there, it was not so easy. Travelling abroad, educated Kuwaitis tended to adopt a style of speech more like the Arabic of the newspapers and the radio, and some even copied the local colloquial, to avoid being misunderstood in a social as well as a linguistic sense.

Another joke, which I do not think the Egyptians would have told to a Kuwaiti on first acquaintance, needs a little more explaining. When a Kuwaiti schoolboy asked to leave the room, one of the teachers had heard him say, 'My father is pissing.' The colloquial word meaning 'to piss' is the same, and regarded as coarse, in both dialects, but the word meaning 'to want' is different. 'I want', in Kuwaiti Arabic, was a word which appeared in the dictionary as *abghī*, but was pronounced locally *abī*. Even the unelided form *abghī* would, however, have been an unusual word to use for 'I want' in Egypt, whereas *abī* was the literary form of the word for 'my father'—hence the joke. It may sound to a Western person to have been a joke based on the idea that differences of colloquial language between one place and another can produce absurd misunderstandings, but if one bears in mind that a free and easy—even casual—relation between fathers and sons, however widely taken for granted in the West, is not regarded as acceptable in Arab countries, the joke assumes a different tone. As I saw it, the point of the joke, though made good-humouredly, was that Kuwaiti Arabic was funny and inferior, with the implication that if Kuwaitis wanted to be 'civilized' (like Egyptians) they ought to change their Arabic. Otherwise, any reasonable person might even wonder whether they were so bucolic as to allow children to speak of their fathers without proper respect.

Foreign agencies and partnerships were some of the obvious respects in which business and the acquisition of wealth had changed, but for all the abrupt economic change that Kuwait was experiencing, business had not made a fresh start. The old families of magnates were still there, thriving on such imponderables as reputation, confidence, opportunity, influence and privilege, all of which had had their present local forms and proportions determined in circumstances that prevailed before oil was ever thought of. So too had the position of the family, and of families morally associated by intermarriage, in business organization. Business in Kuwait was still family business, not companies owned by Kuwaiti or foreign share-holders who bought their control on the stock market, nor purely foreign companies whose moral stake in the country was limited to business morality. If a sociological conspectus confined to the local present could not even explain the new oil camp at Al-Ahmadi with its grid system and its 'Indian Village', it could scarcely be the key to understanding Kuwait.

It was from the old seafaring industries that modern Kuwait had inherited the mercantile values of confidence and reputation. These values underpinned Kuwait business transactions, as they underpinned the transactions of the London Stock

Exchange, with its motto, 'My word is my bond.' The parallel was remarkably close. Like the stockbrokers of the City of London, the Kuwaiti merchant community expected its members to stand by promises made by word of mouth, even on the telephone (an obligation which members of the general public commented on with pride and respect), and the man who lost his reputation could not expect a second chance, or a helping hand when he came to need it. In the times when Kuwait lived on pearl-fishing and the trading voyage, the Kuwaiti merchants' co-operation as a community had been notable in the Gulf. According to the customary sea law of Kuwait, when goods had to be jettisoned to lighten a merchant dhow in a storm, the loss was averaged out *pro rata* among all those who were shipping goods in the dhow. (The English word 'average' derives philologically from the Nordic word *havaria*, which denoted a similar custom.) And when a merchant or boat owner—and many of them were both—found himself in serious financial difficulties, perhaps through several shipwrecks happening at the same time, the convention (not the law) was that the other merchants would club together and alleviate his debts. From an external point of view, such mutual aid could be regarded as a form of insurance, but in Kuwait it was always spoken of as a matter of honour (*sharaf*). The first occasion when the merchants had allowed one of their number to go bankrupt was said to have occurred only a few years before. With the speculation that was already gaining momentum as a result of oil developments, it had become more difficult to maintain the custom of financial rescue, which in earlier insecure times had protected everyone by protecting each, and, in any case, losses that occurred through speculation scarcely came into the same category as disasters at sea.

It was in Dubai, a few months later, that a Kuwaiti merchant said to me, 'Business does not depend on a few rich people, it depends on a lot of poor people who have some money to spend.' Most poor, or relatively poor people earned their living by manual labour, and manual labour in Kuwait was now largely, though by no means entirely, performed by immigrants. Here the change from the formative past was more obviously abrupt than the change in business, not only because immigrant labour was replacing local labour, but because of the organization of employment and the method of payment for work. When such wealth as Kuwait used to earn had been produced by seafaring manual labour (with its finance and management) and the most profitable and prestigious businesses had been labour intensive on a large scale, payment for work had not been in wages but in profit-sharing, bailed out and extended by loans. Hence, the economic relation between rich and poor, or even between rich and rich, had been utterly different. New relations of employment were wage relations, a set amount of money paid at regular and frequent intervals for work that continued all the year round. The old relations were based on an uncertain amount of money, often paid out only once a year for seasonal work. In the old system, within which capital and labour had appeared as profit-sharing partners rather than employees and employed, the continuity of working relations often embraced whole families for generations. Financial insecurity and uncertainty were combined with long-term

stability. In this sense, the economic relations between capital and labour in Kuwait had been to some extent similar to the relations between landlord and peasant in the more fertile parts of the Middle East before land reform, the uncertainty, in the latter case, arising from the uncertainty of the harvests, though as the land is different from the sea, the relations of seafarers with owners of the boats had been significantly different in quality from the relations of peasants with the owners of the land.

With no agriculture, the old economy had been created entirely out of trade and seafaring. Kuwait had presumably begun as a simple fishing village, but with fishing alone, a village it would have remained. As a town, Kuwait had lived by fishing for pearls and by trade based upon merchant voyaging. Both the pearling and the voyaging were seasonal activities, the one depending on the monsoon winds that bore Kuwaiti dhows to India and East Africa and back, and the other depending on the heat of the Gulf in the summer months, when the depths of the sea were warm enough to allow pearl-divers to stay in the water all day long.

Although I had read various good accounts of the seafaring industries, I only learnt how uncertain their profits were during discussions in the Gulf, and this uncertainty suggested why the economic organization of seafaring industries had taken the form of profit-sharing. In both industries, the profits made by any particular boat were highly variable. Merchant dhows depended on buying and selling and on what cargoes they found to carry between intermediate stages of the voyage; while in pearl-fishing, finding a few really valuable pearls, among the small pearls that could always be relied on, made all the difference between success and near failure. Instead of receiving wages, the sailors and the pearl-fishers had shared the profits, the risks and the losses.

Recurrent debt had been a formal part of maritime economic organization. Before embarking, the pearl-fishers and the dhow crews had received from the boat owners fixed advances, in order to maintain their dependants while they were away. The advances were deducted from their shares at the end of the voyage. The uncertainty of profits and unemployment between seasons had, however, produced another situation in which debt was perennial and endemic, to a point where it became part of the economic system. For everyone, sooner or later, there would come a bad year and, in between seasons, when work was hard to find, the seafarer would have to request a further loan from the boat owner to tide him over until the next season. The boat owner, in his turn, might himself have to run into debt in order to provide loans for his crew. If the following season was as disappointing as the last, the debts would have to be carried over and increased, and thus some debts lasted for years and some for lifetimes. Men who had lived by pearl-diving said that all that had kept them going was hope. On the other hand, during my whole time in the Gulf, I came across no one who complained of exploitation.

Of the old seafaring activities of the Gulf, pearl-fishing had almost entirely ceased and deep-sea trading voyages were now few. Only fishing continued to flourish in the old way. Even that had changed a little with the addition of diesel

engines to convert the old sailing boats into launches. On a launch, for example, the man who looked after the engine (who was called *dreiwel*—presumably from ‘driver’) was a wage employee. The rest of the fishermen on the launch continued, however, to be paid by profit-sharing, which was the traditional system of payment for labour in all the seafaring industries of the Gulf. In profit-sharing, the basic principle was that the sailors took four-fifths of the profit while the boat and equipment took one-fifth. Then, from this fifth, various deductions were made leaving the share of ‘capital’, which was also ‘management’, at something below ten per cent or, as it was put, ‘half-a-fifth’. Illiterate they might be, but most men were still very good at doing mental arithmetic in terms of these fractions.

I soon realized that the implications of this economic system were very different from what is implied by ‘profit-sharing’ in modern Europe. Whereas in Europe such shares as a company may distribute to its employees out of its profits are a supplement to regular wages, in the Gulf a share in profits constituted the entire income of the labourer. Such sharing readily converted itself into a system of debt binding the labourer to his employer. The experience of the *zār* practitioner whom I have already mentioned proved to exemplify the wider implications of the profit-sharing system, since he himself had once gone on a voyage which produced no profits to share.<sup>2</sup>

At that time, when so much of the sea carrying trade had been taken over by European shipping, the main chance of making a worthwhile profit from a trading voyage lay in smuggling. Gold could be imported and exported freely in the Gulf shaikhdoms, but in India such transfers were strictly controlled. It was there that the gamble lay. In Kuwait, I had been shown over an ocean-going launch under construction. The boat builder pointed out the various places where types of cargo, such as dates, were to be stowed. Then, at the end of the tour, he opened some concealed chambers hollowed out in the fabric of the boat and said, ‘And this is where we put the gold.’ The *zār* practitioner had gambled with gold and lost. When a youth, he had gone for the first time on a trading voyage to Bombay in the hope of earning enough money to get married. Following the regular practice, he had accepted a loan from the boat owner to help support his family while he was away. Then, since the boat was carrying gold, he had borrowed a further sum to acquire a share in the expected smuggling profits. He had hated the voyage, with its discomfort and its poor food. Moreover, this had been his first real experience of the dangers of the sea, and though he did not say so he had obviously been afraid. As, with relief after a stormy voyage, they approached Bombay, the first boat they sighted was an Indian customs launch heading straight towards them. Threatened with discovery and arrest, there was no alternative for the dhow but to jettison the gold. It was hoped that some of the crew, who were experienced pearl-divers, would be able to retrieve it later, but the water turned out to be too deep even for them and the gold was lost. Thus, when the dhow returned to Kuwait and the final accounts were drawn up, the whole voyage proved

2. See ‘Disorientations: Part Three’, *JASO*, Vol. XXII, no. 1, p. 11.

to have made a net loss, and instead of the handsome profit he had been hoping for, the youth found himself saddled with a substantial debt in respect of the loans he had received before the voyage. His debt was too great for him or his family to repay—had they had the money, he would never have gone on the voyage in the first place. He spent two or three years in constant fear that the boat owner, his creditor, would insist that he embarked on a second voyage to earn the money. The loan was a loan like any other, and if the offer of a second voyage had been refused, a harsher creditor could have sold up what property the family had so as to get his money back. Hence, it appeared, the nervous crisis that led the young man to suffer from the *zār* spirits and introduced him to the cult. I do not think he made much profit from being an occasional *zār* practitioner, but fortunately he was able to obtain other employment, which solved his problem. Had he made the same initial mistake in former times, however, when seafaring was the only work available, he would probably have been caught up for years, if not for life, in work for which he was by temperament exceptionally unsuited. Debt could have carried over, even increased, from year to year. At his death, it might also have committed his sons to the same work, since again the alternative could have been total destitution, with the family house sold over their heads.

Such indebtedness, binding seafarers to the owners of the boats they sailed in, was now almost a thing of the past, since the two major industries, pearl-fishing and merchant voyaging, in which it had prevailed and which had formerly dominated the economy, were now of only peripheral significance, and there was plenty of other work available. Debt had never played such an important part in the still-flourishing fishing industry, because fishing did not require long absences at sea during which the fisherman's family had to be provided for by borrowing from the boat owner. Moreover, though in Failaka and Kuwait the really profitable fishing season had been the summer, when shoals of *zubaidī* fish (the favourite fish of Kuwait) teemed in local waters, fishing was an all-year-round activity and so provided fishermen with an all-the-year-round income. Pearl-fishing, on the other hand, had only been possible during the summer months when the water of the Gulf was warm enough for a diver to work all day. The share in profits that a pearl-fisher received at the end of the summer season had had to last him for the whole year, and in the days when little other work was available, pearl-fishers had needed loans to tide them over the winter.

The fishing launch captains were, however, under a moral obligation to supply occasional loans to members of the crew who needed extra money for some personal reason, such as a wedding. I only knew one launch captain well enough for him to volunteer information about confidential matters, but when, in conversation with other captains, I referred to this information as if it were something taken for granted, no one denied it. This particular captain said that when a fisherman was an exceptionally good worker, his captain would be anxious to lend him money, because then the fisherman would have to go on working in his boat. If a good fisherman were not in the captain's debt, the captain might have to agree secretly to give him an extra fraction of a share at each distribution

of the profits, and this fraction would have to be deducted from the 'boat's' share. Otherwise, the fisherman might be attracted to another boat by a similar secret offer. In fishing, being a good worker not only meant being good at the work, but good at turning up for it. Fishermen had good reason not to love the sea, and few of them wanted to work all the time, away from their beds and their families. After the sale of a good catch, many would stay at home until they had spent the money. For facing the hardships of the sea, fishermen gained neither honour nor prosperity, and the more go-ahead ones would find something more profitable.

A debt obligation, similar to that which might bind a fisherman to his captain, could also bind the fishing captain to a fishmonger in Kuwait. If the captain was indebted to the fishmonger, the fishmonger had first refusal of the catch. This meant that, by providing the loan, the fishmonger was assuring his own fish supply, much as the captain was assuring his labour supply by means of the loans he made to his fishermen. In the days of pearl-fishing, a similar indebtedness had bound the captains of the pearling boats to the pearl merchants.

Before leaving England, I had read a good deal both about profit-sharing and about the prevalence of debt in the seafaring industries, in old, well-informed accounts of the Gulf, published when pearl-fishing and merchant voyaging both flourished. These accounts made it apparent that debt and profit-sharing were closely connected, and that, together, they lay at the centre of the traditional economic system. I had, however, thought of profit-sharing and debt only in the context of economic relations. In Kuwait and Failaka, speaking to men who well remembered the circumstances in which they had once worked at sea, I had it made very clear to me that they also belonged within moral relations. It was not because, strictly speaking, loans had to be interest free, the taking of interest being forbidden (*ḥarām*), and thus gravely sinful, in Islam. According to the law, it was perfectly legitimate to provide a loan in the form of goods to be paid for well in arrears of delivery, and these goods were then supplied at a higher price than they would have commanded if paid for immediately. Such a procedure, described in English writings as taking 'concealed interest', did not seem very different in economic terms from taking a loan of money from a bank. The moral situation lay in the relation between the owner of a boat and the sailors who worked in the boat. This was a relation of patron and client, and the client had a moral expectation of being helped and looked after by his patron, who was also, usually, his creditor. Because of profit-sharing, the sailors were not, strictly speaking, the 'employees' of the boat owner. They were his 'company of followers' (*jamā'a*). And there was, in Failaka, just such a company.

I have mentioned that the religious teacher whose instructions I attended did not live off his religion.<sup>3</sup> In the humble terms of Failaka, he was a prosperous man, because he was one of three brothers who between them owned two ocean-going dhows, which were now drawn up on the beach. The brothers had stuck together all their lives, and Failaka was their third place of residence. They had

3. 'Disorientations: Part Three', *JASO*, Vol. XXII, no. 1, p. 14.

grown up in a coastal village in southern Iran. Dissatisfied with the state of affairs there, they had moved to another village on the opposite coast of the Gulf, in Muscat territory. After some years, they had moved again and come to Kuwait, in the hope of better opportunities, and the shaikhs had given them permission to settle in Failaka. Moving from one home to another in their dhows, the brothers had not only brought all their seamen with them, but all their seamen's families too—a total of about forty small families. These made up the boat owners' 'company of followers'. The two dhows made only occasional voyages, and in the meantime the followers took alternative work, but whatever the work, they remained morally, and even administratively, bound up with their patrons. Any one of them who was in trouble, or had to deal with the shaikhs, or even needed advice, would expect and be expected to apply to the brothers for help. This company was a community within a community.

For the little group of Kuwaiti friends with whom I sat out of doors in the evenings, the past was over and done with—'what was past was past', and reminiscing about it was a waste of time. They did answer a few questions about the seafaring industries, a tedious task in any case, because of my ignorance of the local terms for 'diver', 'puller', 'share', 'the half-of-the-fifth'—even 'pearls', which the people of the Gulf called *gumash*, a word translated in my dictionary, published in Egypt, as, 'trash; rubbish. Stuff; woven material....Furniture'. The friends became much more interested, indeed mildly indignant, when I asked about debt. This was where a misinterpretation of the past distorted the proportions of the present. Having read that the pearl-fishing days were times when, as it was put by an English mission doctor, 'everyone bought goods for more than they were worth and sold them for less, because everyone was in debt', and having no knowledge of finance, I had not envisaged debt as a necessary corollary to investment, but thought of it as a sort of economic disease, which gave the rich an opportunity to exploit the poor. I asked whether the rulers of Kuwait had, in patriarchal fashion, shielded the poor against such exploitation. This question was not well-received. I had misunderstood the old Kuwaiti relationships: I was attaching too much importance to the shaikhs, as Englishmen always did. Moreover, when the British Government did so, and acted upon it, with all its power over Kuwait behind the scenes, what started as an exaggeration became a reality. And yet we prided ourselves on democratic government.

The Kuwaitis said there had been plenty of noble and important people in Kuwait besides the shaikhs. The shaikhs had been there to maintain law and order and look after the country's defence, and that was what they had been paid for: the people of Kuwait had allowed them to tax pearl-fishing and levy customs duties so as to provide them with an income. Why should I suppose that the shaikhs were necessarily more just than anyone else? And had they been all-powerful,

how could they have contented themselves with customs duties of only four per cent? The great men who made the wealth of Kuwait had been the merchants and the boat owners—especially the pearl merchants, some of whom had been richer than the shaikhs. When the shaikhs were entertaining, they used to send round to the merchants and ask to borrow carpets from their houses. To be a pearl merchant had been the height of honour, and no one had been second to the great pearl merchants in generosity and integrity. They had not just been business men obsessed with making money, and even when they lost their fortunes they had not lost their pride. During the decline of the pearl industry, when everyone was in difficulties, the pearl merchants and the boat owners had thought it dishonourable to seize the small assets of debtors poorer than themselves and had preferred to forgive the debts. Even now, when the poor men were making money, the debts had never been repaid.

On one of my return visits to Kuwait from Failaka, I was shown some of the business correspondence preserved by one former pearl merchant family, dating from the time when the industry first began its abrupt decline. The letters, addressed to importers in London and Paris, were increasingly urgent, and eventually desperate, asking what had happened to the market, and begging the importers to buy, if only a little, to keep the business going. The merchants had not forgiven local debts because they could afford to, but because their debtors were already on the verge of destitution. In those hard times, I heard, shaikhs had not always been as generous as merchants.

Pearls, like Persian carpets, were luxuries and investments for the rich of the world, produced, out of their necessity, by men who, in world terms, were the poor and the but modestly prosperous. In the years around 1930, the pearl industry had been assailed from two sides at once by situations arising out of the inadequacies of Western economic policies on the one hand and out of the efficiency of one branch of Eastern technology on the other. The people of the Gulf were in no good position to appreciate either cause of the disaster to their livelihood, and were thus even more vulnerable than they might otherwise have been. Two quite separate factors combined to ruin the market: the industrial depression in the United States and Europe, and the development of cultured pearls in Japan. Even the business men of the West, part of a modern-educated public with information about world affairs readily available to them through newspapers and the radio, had rushed unwittingly into the Wall Street crash. In the Gulf, world communications were sparse, and even the merchants knew little about the wider implications of banking or limited liability. They lived in a very different system of family business and loans that were largely in the form of goods. Nevertheless, in respect of the depression, the problem, however serious, was only one of degree: the pearl market, like all others, was known to fluctuate, and the merchants' difficulty lay in foreseeing how deep and protracted the world depression was going to be, in order to reduce investment in production before their capital was exhausted.

The technology which produced the cultured pearl was a more insidious matter. To grasp its significance, to realize that once cultured pearls were

produced the market for natural pearls could never be the same again, would have required a step of imagination that, however small in an ultimate sense, infringed the border of customary epistemology. The traditional, pious view was that pearls were natural things produced for man by providence—how could man make them for himself? Even in the 1950s, when plenty of individual people in the Gulf knew and accepted the scientific fact that cultured pearls were produced by what was intrinsically the same ‘natural’ process as natural pearls, the scientific explanation of how pearls came into being was not a part of widely accepted general knowledge. The pious explanation was still dominant among the general public, and even some of those who were aware of the scientific fact would still insist that cultured pearls were no substitute for the real thing. And yet a quarter of a century had passed since the market had decided otherwise.<sup>4</sup>

But for the dominance of the pious explanation, one supposes that cultured pearls could just as well have been produced in the Gulf as in Japan and could have done something towards alleviating some of the poverty which would still exist there now [1986] but for the greater blessing of oil. This is the sort of problem that many people in the Gulf were well aware of in the 1950s, and is one of the reasons why they placed such a high priority on education once the money was available. Kuwait generously offered schools to the shaikhs of the Trucial Coast, and some, though not all, accepted. There was still an opposition to be overcome. When, from Kuwait, I travelled to Dubai, a merchant there told me that he had put a child’s toy globe in the front of his shop. Various people had asked him what it was, and he had told them that it was a model of the shape of the world. Some religious old men, insisting that the world was flat, had criticized him so much behind his back for lack of piety that he had thought it better to take the globe back to the privacy of his home.

4. Traditionally, if there was any more elaborate explanation than the pious one that pearls were created by providence, it did no more than introduce an intervening act of providence: an oyster first caught a raindrop and then converted it into a pearl. At first sight, this may seem in principle to be the same type of explanation (though obviously not confirmed by experiment) as that the oyster makes the pearl as the result of an infection caused by a grain of sand. This, I think, would be a misinterpretation, because the raindrop was explained in the same pious way as the pearl, it was created by providence. True, the raindrop came from a cloud, but a cloud was not thought of in terms of water vapour, nor the raindrop in terms of condensation. The rain was ‘a blessing’.

In epistemological terms, the problem of the pious and the scientific explanations is not, it seems to me, a problem of scientific explanations as an alternative to religious explanations. Rather, it relates to the point at which the idea of contingency enters into the explanation. In the pious explanation, associated with customary epistemology, the pearl and the raindrop are directly contingent on providence. An equally religious, but more scientific, explanation, is that they come into being in accordance with natural laws that are themselves contingent upon providence, and that there is no impiety in seeking for these natural laws, any more than there is in seeking for natural pearls.

The privileged, busy men who in Kuwait bore the title of 'shaikh' were members of the ruling family, but there was one Shaikh of Kuwait, referred to in official English as 'the Ruler'. Published accounts of the Gulf in earlier days gave the impression that the function of the shaikhly family in each state was simply to produce a hereditary ruler to govern the state in a patriarchal fashion, electing him from among themselves in a process of consultation with the leading men of the community. In the anthropology of the 1950s, however, the idea of 'patriarchal' government was regarded with some scepticism, as being a European invention derived from the pieties of the Old Testament by people who, whether Christians, Jews or rationalists, had never lived within a system that was anything like it. Was it possible that real people in real situations would be content to recognize one wise old man as father of the community and do as he told them? The fact that some rulers had come to power by force, while others had been deposed and more often than not killed, suggested a less benevolent system. On the other hand, the idea of any indigenous political system functioning by brute force was also regarded sceptically at that time: most anthropological research had been carried out in colonies where such force as was used in the course of government was used against, and not by, the people anthropologists were studying. It was widely assumed that government could not be conducted successfully without the tacit assent of the majority of the population. The political implications of fear, physical danger and casual violence had not yet become so familiar in the history of so many new states as to undermine the optimistic notion that government has to be, in some reasonable sense, representative.

As ideas, patriarchy and autocracy are not opposites: both assume that the ruler is obeyed by those he rules. The difference lies in the reason for obedience. The subject is supposed to obey the patriarch because he wants to, and to obey the autocrat because he has to. In the Gulf states there was, however, one institution that suggested an alternative to simple obedience and seemed to imply a system within which the people participated in the government. (One definition of political structure current at that time was that it was the necessary relation between political institutions.) In the Gulf, the rulers of all the various shaikhdoms were said to make themselves readily accessible to their people by holding a daily, public audience in which they presided over an open discussion of local affairs and dealt with requests, complaints and legal cases as they arose. I had envisaged the ruler's public audience as a popular assembly lying at the heart of the political system and maintaining government by consent in each state. As I saw it, the institution derived from the assemblies of bedouin shaikhs and their tribal followers, where the shaikhs had no power of coercion and the system was simply one of leadership. In the settled circumstances of the Gulf towns and villages an element of coercion had been introduced, but English accounts suggested that the system had continued to be one of public consultation and open government, and that even the great Ibn Sa'ud, at the centre of his vast Arabian kingdom, did not hold himself aloof from ordinary people or disregard the popular will. These accounts were not entirely wrong, but neither were they very accurate.

Confronted with even more work and more applications than the other senior members of his family, the Ruler, Shaikh Abdullah al-Salim, was not holding public audiences during the time I spent in Kuwait and Failaka, but he was not therefore inaccessible. As time went on, having become embarrassed by people's surprise at my never having met him, I thought it best to try to arrange to pay my respects. There seemed to be little prospect of making an arrangement through the Political Agency: I had no special business with the Ruler, and no doubt all too many visitors hoped to see him. It seemed best to ask the director of the customs, the father of my Oxford friend.<sup>5</sup> He took me down to the office of the head of the customs on the floor below. The head of customs, to whom the director explained the situation, was a very suitable person to ask since he was the Ruler's younger son. He spoke to his father briefly on the telephone, and said to me, 'My father is terribly sorry, but he is busy today. Would tomorrow morning be all right for you?' Kuwait remained a very personal place.

This private accessibility, however, was a rather different matter from holding a regular public audience. In descriptions of the Gulf states in earlier times, it was reported that each ruler held a *majlis* (public audience) daily. In the *majlis*, rulers were said to make themselves available to all members of the public and visitors, to deal with requests, complaints and legal cases as they arose, and to preside over an open discussion of public affairs. Before arriving in Kuwait I had imagined this *majlis* as a sort of informal parliament, the heart of some traditional Arab democracy that derived originally from the bedouin shaikhs and their tribesmen and extended both to the rulers of the Gulf states and to the great Ibn Saud in the centre of his huge kingdom. For a hopeful anthropologist, it was disconcerting to find that the central political institution of the society seemed to have disappeared from under his nose, and that people seemed to be getting on quite well without it.

At that time, the heads of all government departments were members of the ruling family. Shaikhs also presided over the law court, though they had an Islamic legal expert to consult over technical difficulties. The most extreme penalties of Islamic law were not, in practice, imposed in Kuwait in respect of adultery or theft, and, as in the rest of the shaikhdoms, capital punishment for murder was most uncommon. Corporal punishment was not unusual. When passing the court, one would sometimes see a man brought out, thrown down in the gutter by the guards and beaten with their camel sticks.

It was a relatively new thing in Kuwait to have a law court at all. Just before the Second World War, about the time when oil was first discovered, a party had formed in Kuwait that advocated some modernization of the form of government. One of its main proposals had been the establishment of a regular court of justice. (Another had been the introduction of some measure of public control over state revenues.) The proposals had led to political conflict ending in some violence. In spite of all the changes that had occurred between 1938-9 and 1954, the history

5. See 'Disorientations: Part Two', *JASO*, Vol. XXI, no. 3, p. 260.

of this conflict was still a living issue, regarded by many as too sensitive to talk about, and indeed it remains a rather sensitive issue even now [1986]. It should be remembered that Kuwait was quite a small community where all public figures were also private friends and acquaintances, or sometimes private enemies. At that time, most of those who had been directly involved were still alive and active. The late ruler, Shaikh Ahmed al-Jabir, had of course been involved in a most important way, but so too had his successor, the then ruler Shaikh Abdullah al-Salim, and on the opposite side. A number of very important merchants had been on the side of modernization, and there had been divisions within the merchant families, as among the shaikhs. The former state secretary, whom I met occasionally, never spoke about the constitutional movement. I was told that he had been obliged to resign when it was suppressed, but the present state secretary was his son. The shaikh who headed the department of education had been one of those who suppressed it, when the shaikhs took their rifles and drove out with carloads of bedouin men-at-arms to arrest their leading opponents and there were some deaths. And afterwards, when Shaikh Ahmed al-Jabir died, many other bedouin had gathered at Jahra, determined to give their support if necessary to the succession of Shaikh Abdullah al-Salim, or maybe to join in the fighting if the succession was not settled peacefully. These were things it was possible to learn about only very slowly, particularly since the question of popular representation in the government of the state had still not been in any way solved.

But what did the people of Failaka make of the collective representation which demoted them to being no more than Arabized foreigners—did they think they were 'really' Persians? I could have asked the director of the customs. Both his son and he had told me that their family came from Failaka, and the director was quite proud that his grandfather had rebuilt the mosque there. But it would have been brash to ask an older friend, who was an important man in Kuwait whether he was really a Persian. Perhaps he would just have been amused, but nevertheless, in Kuwait, a Persian was not the very best thing to be. In fact, I waited until I could ask the question in Failaka, in the form, 'Who are the people of Failaka descended from?' The answer turned out to contradict what the former political agent had said, but still to remain consistent with it. If the fact was different, the principle was the same. The people of Failaka had come from the Persian coast; nevertheless, they were Arabs. The reason was quite simple: much of the Persian coast was populated by Arabs whose early ancestors were the Muslim heroes who had conquered Persia in the early days of Islam.

OXFORD RESEARCH IN SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

**ABSTRACTS OF THESES IN SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY  
FOR WHICH HIGHER DEGREES WERE AWARDED  
BY THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD IN 1990**

The research theses in social and cultural anthropology listed here are those for which higher degrees were awarded by the University of Oxford in 1990. The text of each abstract is as supplied by the author in the copy of the thesis held in the Bodleian Library of the University. Those wishing to consult a particular thesis should apply to the Bodleian or to the British Library Lending Division (BLLD), which should be able to supply microfilm copies or reprints on request. We have not been able to supply BLLD reference numbers here. They should be available from the Bodleian in due course.

1. ANDREW W. BEATTY, *Exchange and Social Organization in Nias, Indonesia*. D.Phil.

Following a description of local descent groups, I analyse the structure of marriage alliance and the relation between descent groups and the parties temporarily involved in the contracting of a marriage. This is followed by a presentation of the principles involved in the calculation and determination of bridewealth with analysis of the meaning of prestations and their place in the ideology of affinity. A discussion of measurement—its techniques, symbolism and relation to types of exchange—leads into a description of the feast of merit. Two contrasted modes of exchange are identified: symmetric exchange articulates status relationships and thus position within the society as a whole; complementary exchange, exemplified in bridewealth and alliance prestations, operates in the ego-centred realm of affinity; tribute is given in return for the blessing and quasi-divine benevolent

influence of wife-giving affines. These two modes of exchange, corresponding to different levels of social structure, are seen to be interrelated in the ritual of the feast of merit. Case histories are used to explore the pragmatic and political aspects of feast giving. A chapter on status and leadership explores the relation between prestige won in feasting, rank and power. Concepts of gift, debt and credit are outlined and the politics of ceremonial exchange is analysed. The last chapter is a comparison of regional types of social structure in Nias, in which common cultural categories, values and structural principles are identified and the dimensions of variation are analysed. The thesis concludes with a brief discussion of theoretical topics in the anthropology of traditional exchange.

2. STEPHEN HOLLAND, *Development and Differentiation in Rural Thailand: A Case Study from the Central Region*. D.Phil.

This thesis is a contribution to the study of rural development and social change. The economy, polity and society of rural Thailand has undergone enormous transformations in the past century and a half. These centre on the penetration of rural communities by structures of state and capital. An important aspect of this exchange is the emergence of 'differentiation' (or 'stratification'): i.e., the development of disparities between the economic status and circumstances of households in the same locality. This thesis reports data pertaining to intra-village differentiation which were collected during an anthropological study of a rural community in Central Thailand.

Rural differentiation in Thailand is considered from a number of related perspectives. Macro-level, historical transformations of the Thai countryside are discussed, and an interpretive model of the consequent stratification discernible in the village study site are presented. Ongoing processes of differentiation, which focus on the monopolization of local resources by rural élites in the context of the developing village, are delineated. Data pertaining to informants' economic related decisions and behaviours reveal that different strata of villagers hold dissimilar 'economic attitudes': rich villagers' economic decision-making accords with Western notions of economic 'rationality', whilst poor villagers tended to be both non-accumulatory and apparently reckless in the economic arena. Middle ranking villagers tended toward economic quiescence. This phenomenon is explained by a reconstruction of some elements of poor villagers' underlying system of values of beliefs.

The consequences of intra-village differentiation for social identities and relations are discussed by reference to the 'class hypothesis': i.e., that the continued experience of increasing differentiation gives rise to class identities and, hence, class based social relations. Data suggest that, whilst stratification informs social identities and interactions to some extent, at present this is over-ridden by other, non-economic factors.

3. AKIFUMI IWABUCHI, *The Social Organization of the Alas of Northern Sumatra*. D.Phil.

This thesis is a study of the social organization of the Alas people of northern Sumatra in Indonesia, based upon field research of eighteen months in Alasland. There had been no first-hand study conducted among this ethnic group, so its aim is to give a detailed description of the social organization and to demonstrate the contrasts and resemblances between the Alas and the other ethnic groups of northern Sumatra. The thesis consists of seven chapters. In Chapter I, introductory information, such as the geography, history, language, and economy of Alasland, is provided. Chapter II is devoted to the village, which is the most important social and political unit, and to a particular village where I conducted intensive field research for nearly fourteen months. The four succeeding chapters offer an analysis of the 'kinship' system. Chapter III deals with not only the structure of family and household, but also the house and its symbolism. Chapter IV presents problems of the patrilineal descent group, which is the most noticeable characteristic of the social organization. In Chapter V, the categorical aspect of social organization, i.e. the relationship terminology, is examined. The terminology is lineal, but non-prescriptive. Chapter VI is concerned with special features in the marriage and affinal relationships, including marriage payments and dowry. The final one, Chapter VII, draws conclusions: first of all, the Alas relationship terminology is compared with the terminologies of the two neighbouring ethnic groups, viz, the Batak and Gayo; secondly, regional variations among Alas villages are discussed; thirdly, social change in Alasland is treated, because in this area, as in the whole of Indonesia, social change is caused by economic decline, migration of other ethnic groups, the introduction of universal Indonesian culture, the destruction of the ecosystem, and so forth.

4. BRIAN JOHN MCGOVERN, *The Idea of Applied Social Science with Special Reference to Social Anthropology*. D.Phil.

The idea of an applied social science is incoherent. I begin chapter one by demonstrating how loosely especially the phrase 'applied anthropology' is used. However, usage appears to gather what coherence it has from an association with two concepts, 'detachment' and 'participation'. From the discussion of these concepts in their relation to social science which follows, it emerges that there seem to be good logical grounds for suspicion of both 'detached' and 'committed' versions of social science. Although advertised as very different, they show an essential identity in that each bids for 'purity', which I recognize to be a religious concept. The most radical of the attempts to dispense with 'purity' in the name of society, 'critical theory', I discuss at length in chapter two, finding its 'immanent critique' of social science surprisingly valid. The logical consequence of this is more remarkable still. As I argue in the remainder of chapter two, the

success of the 'immanent critique' of social science is its abolition. The 'immanent critique' reinforces the suspicion that social science is ideology in the true sense, that there can be no applied social science because social science is *always* 'applied', and that it is its supposed 'purity' that is applied. Another alternative to 'scientism' is looked at in the third chapter, 'understanding'. In the case of arguably the greatest exponent of the method of *Verstehen*, Max Weber, it can be seen that it is impossible to accommodate understanding in the true sense with 'science'. In the case of another influential figure in this tradition, R. G. Collingwood, 'understanding' is seen to degenerate into relativism, which is indeed, as the discussion of Weber showed, rationalism's true face. In chapter four I examine the case of applied anthropology as it was between 1922 and 1945 or thereabouts, providing evidence for my contention that the idea of an applied social science is incoherent because social science is always applied. I return to the other main contention of this thesis in the final chapter, suggesting that if social science may be seen to bear a religious character, that is because such was imprinted upon it at its founding.

##### 5. MARTIN STOKES, *Anthropological Perspectives on Music in Turkey*. D.Phil.

This thesis describes the ways in which Turkish musicians discuss, dispute and attribute meaning to their own music. It focuses primarily on the debate over a kind of music associated with Istanbul, but popular throughout Turkey, known as *arabesk*. The thesis examines the tensions between conflicting representations of society, culture and self as they are manifested in Turkish music.

The thesis falls into three sections. The introductory section presents an overview of theoretical and methodological issues. The first chapter poses the broad theoretical problem of how two conflicting concepts of music can be entertained by the same group of people. An official version of how music should be, expressed in a constructed 'folk' (*halk*) music, contests the rampant popularity of *arabesk*. Since *arabesk* is seen in Turkey as being an essentially urban phenomenon, the second and third chapters relate this issue to the ethnography of Istanbul and to current anthropological and sociological literature on the Middle Eastern city, discussing the nature of urban anthropological fieldwork.

The second part outlines the Turkish theory of culture, and its role in the creation of a national folk music. Chapter four puts the 'music reforms' in their historical context, and discusses the present-day mandate of the Turkish Radio and Television in collecting and performing *halk* music. Chapter five looks at the way in which this music has developed in relation to Turkish art-music theory, and discusses the central role played by the Turkish long-necked lute (*baglama*) and the concept of notation.

The third section focuses on *arabesk*. Chapter six discusses musicological and sociological critique of this music in relation to urbanization problems and the notion of '*dolmus* culture'. The following two chapters are concerned with the

terms in which the music (chapter seven) and the texts (chapter eight) are evaluated and discussed. Chapter nine relates the metaphorical expression of alienation in *arabesk* to the apparently similar sentiments described in religious poetry and music (*sema*), concluding with the observation that the concept of music expressed in *arabesk* is, in relation both to *sema* and *halk* music, radically opposed, the former being essentially passive and disintegrative whilst the latter are performative and integrative. 'Music' is thus an essentially ambiguous category in Turkish social experience.

6. MAI ZAKI-YAMANI, Formality and Propriety in the Hejaz. D.Phil.

Abstract not available at time of going to press.

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