

**OXFORD RESEARCH IN SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY**

**ABSTRACTS OF THESES  
IN SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY  
FOR WHICH HIGHER DEGREES WERE AWARDED  
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**NANCEE OKU BRIGHT, Mothers of Steel: The Women of Um Gargur, an Eritrean Refugee Settlement in Sudan. D.Phil.**

This is an ethnographic study of the lives and experience of Eritrean refugee women in Um Gargur, a settlement in eastern Sudan established in 1976. It is based upon fourteen months of fieldwork and builds upon the findings of my 1985 M.Phil. thesis, 'A Preliminary Study of the Position of Eritrean Refugees in the Sudan', for which I conducted two months of research in Um Gargur. While the M.Phil. thesis was a comparative study of Um Gargur and two other cases of resettlement in Africa, here I am concerned primarily with questions of gender, everyday life, and how processes of change and realignments of power impact upon women in displaced heterogeneous societies.

After more than a decade in exile the people of Um Gargur continue to be fiercely nationalistic and as unresigned to remaining refugees as they are to assimilating into Sudan. There is also a growing trend towards Islamic conservatism in the settlement. This, coupled with the fact that Um Gargur is

composed largely of mistrusted ‘strangers’, means that women experience more restrictions in Um Gargur than they did in their communities of origin. The aim of the thesis is to examine the effect of displacement and exile upon gender roles, social infrastructures, traditions and perceptions, as people of disparate origins, occasionally with conflicting beliefs and mores, negotiate a way of living together. The title ‘Mothers of Steel’ is taken from a riot instigated by women when charges were introduced for water. As the women revolted, their children shouted, ‘Our mothers are steel, our fathers are monkeys!’ This represented the main crisis point between men and women. Yet although the title derives from this incident, women, as they feed, nurture, socialize their children and keep their families intact, have clearly become ‘mothers of steel’ in the eyes of their children since they have lived in Um Gargur.

Chapter one introduces an overview of the settlement and shows that women’s deliberate exclusion from all formal institutions leaves them at a disadvantage despite the fact that over 50% of them are household heads for much of the year. The following chapters examine how categories as diverse as politics, honour, health, and economics, impinge on the lives of the refugee women and their families, and argue that in contexts of displacement, where social realities are constantly being redefined, these categories all have a moral dimension. In chapters three and four I show how limited employment opportunities in Um Gargur have meant that the majority of men continuously resident in the settlement have lost their roles as providers while women’s roles have taken on a new symbolic significance. The society attempts to compensate for men’s loss of status by placing greater restrictions upon women. Women’s reactions to this are varied, but significant numbers of them have redrawn the parameters of ‘honourable’ behaviour to allow themselves more flexibility. Women establish ties, not unlike kinship bonds, which traverse ethnic and religious boundaries and offer limited economic power and physical and psychological support. In chapter five I explore the tensions between traditional beliefs and practices and ‘Western’ models of health care.

While society’s notion of what constitutes honour has calcified in reaction to a situation of extreme social dislocation and jeopardization of ‘male’ and ‘female’ behaviour patterns, I show in chapter six that the women of Um Gargur have recognized their common plight and responded by renegotiating their identity, whilst at the same time being the primary agents—through myths, songs, names, and stories about Eritrea—in the construction of their children’s identities as Eritreans. In the conclusion (chapter seven) I introduce the story of the aforementioned water riot to illustrate how radically women’s perceptions of their own power have altered, and how their children now perceive them. I suggest that though the process of change has been slow, the pressures faced by the community have meant that women’s reconceptualization of their own roles has been inevitable.

DAVID P. CRANDALL, *The OvaHimba of Namibia: A Study of Dual Descent and Values*. D.Phil.

This thesis contains a detailed ethnographic account of dual descent among the pastoral, Herero-speaking, OvaHimba, who live in the north-west corner of Namibia, bordering Angola. The system of dual descent is fully discussed and set within the context of the primary values (reconciliation with God and the ancestors, male reproductive power, and the acquisition of cattlewealth) perceived to be important by the OvaHimba.

Chapters 2-7 describe the material life of the OvaHimba. The herding of cattle, sheep, and goats, horticulture, and the food products derived therefrom, are described in relation to both dual descent and the values in which a food hierarchy, as well as attitudes toward economic activity, are rooted.

Chapters 9-16 contain detailed description and analysis of matrilineal and patrilineal kinship. Particular aspects of social life governed by dual descent such as admission to kinship groups, the extension or limitation of perceived matri- or patrilineal/lineal relatedness, residence, marriage, religion, inheritance, division of kinship groups, and dispute settlement, are described as they work or function on the ground. But it is also demonstrated how these various practices are given coherence and meaning by contextualizing kinship within the framework of OvaHimba values.

Through detailed analysis and examples, the ethnographer presents OvaHimba values and society as strongly male-focused, and the system of dual descent as an institution which subtly articulates these values. Throughout the thesis the ethnographer argues that in order to understand dual descent within the OvaHimba context, it must be studied in relation to the overarching cosmology and values of OvaHimba society.

IK-JOO HWANG, *Class, Religion, and Local Community: Social Grouping in Nenagh, Republic of Ireland*. D.Phil.

This is a study of social grouping patterns in and around Nenagh town. In the Introduction, the significance of the present study for Irish ethnography is argued for through a review of the existing literature. In chapter 1, the social grouping patterns which used to obtain in the locality in the pre-war times are described, focusing on informal social mixing. It is shown that the period is characterized by various practices explicitly manifesting social divisions especially by class and religion within the local population. In chapter 2, various aspects of the post-war social change are described as background to understanding the current social grouping patterns. In chapter 3, the current social mixing patterns in sporting clubs, pubs, and homes are described. It is argued that contrary to what the dominant ideology claims, there exists statistically significant social segregation along class, religion, local/outsider, and farmer/urbanite lines, and that the main

mechanism involved in the reproduction of such differentiation is the formation of different tastes in different social groups. In chapter 4, how localities of various levels are constructed as 'local communities' through the language of community in relation to the dominant ideology as well as actualities of social differentiation are described. It is emphasized that the symbolic construction of a local community is not simply a matter of utilizing those elements which are universally shared by its putative members as community symbols and thereby expressing and promoting the integration of the local population. In the Conclusion, the main findings of the present study are summarized, and their implications for cross-cultural comparison in western European ethnography are discussed.

GEORGIA KAUFMANN, *Family Formation and Fertility in a favela in Belo Horizonte, Brazil: An Analysis of Cultural and Demographic Influences*. D.Phil.

This study considers factors that affect a woman's fertility and chances of marriage in a *favela* in Belo Horizonte, the third largest city in Brazil. In 1987-8 participant observation and a microdemographic survey were conducted while living in Alto Vera Cruz (AVC). The thesis is concerned with the processes of family formation and fertility, both of which are associated aspects of biological and social reproduction.

The familial organization found in AVC is contrasted with theoretical concepts of patriarchal and matrifocal families. It is found that the marital status of women is indicative of their status and security. Additionally, residence is found to have important implications for the welfare of women. Women living in housefuls enjoy a better standard of living than women residing neolocally.

The status of women is further related to their pattern of employment. Gender relations define the type of employment and economic contributions to the household. The domestic economies of married, cohabiting and single women are unequal. The differences between these groups of women are further borne out in an analysis of fertility and contraceptive practices. Married women are consistently more successful in all spheres of action than other women; they are better educated, more financially secure, more efficient contraceptors, and are more highly respected. The cohabiting and single women began their reproductive careers earlier, are less well educated, poorer, and less likely to be contracepting efficiently.

These differences between women resident in AVC are related to the broader issues concerning the construction of gender in Brazilian culture; traditional expectations dictate that women are required to be repositories of virtue, and men sexually aggressive. With the erosion of these traditions which confine them to their homes, women make easy prey for men. The pattern of family formation and fertility is seen as an outcome of the development of rapid urbanization, associated social changes, and the clash of these developments with a cultural heritage that is repressive for women, especially those who are darker skinned.

SAYED ASKAR MOUSAVI, *The Hazaras of Afghanistan: An Historical, Cultural, Economic and Political Study*. D.Phil.

The Hazaras are one of several ethnic groups inhabiting Afghanistan. Today they may be found living in regions throughout Afghanistan, although the majority still inhabit the areas of Central Afghanistan traditionally inhabited by them and known as the 'Hazarajat'. The map of Afghanistan no longer includes an area actually called the Hazarajat, so that an accurate description and demarcation of it in today's geography of Afghanistan is somewhat difficult. But the Hazarajat is generally considered to cover the three central provinces of Afghanistan, Bamiyan, Orozgan and Ghour, and parts of Herat, Farah, Kandahar, Ghazni, Parwan, Baghlan and Balkh.

The Hazaras are Muslim, and Shia in the majority. They speak Farsi, though with their own particular accent known as the 'Hazaragi' dialect. Their ethnic origins are as yet uncertain and under debate, despite their obvious Turkic–Mogholi features they are of mixed ethnic composition, and of quite ancient origin. In terms of numbers they form the second largest ethnic group in Afghanistan. However, as a consequence of the discriminatory and segregationist policies of ruling Pashtun–Afghan governments, they remain politically, economically and socially the most underdeveloped group in Afghanistan society. Due to their geopolitical location inside Afghanistan, they were able to live virtually autonomously until the 1890s, after which date they were ruthlessly subjugated. Their resurgence during the 1980s highlighted the potentially determining position enjoyed by the Hazaras, along with their defensive potential in the face of an invading army.

The study of the Hazaras of Afghanistan is not only of interest to the specialist, but provides the best introduction to the study of Afghanistan in general. Its location at the centre of Afghanistan not only accords geopolitical significance to the Hazarajat, but also provides its inhabitants with a unique cultural and tribal heritage. Just as Afghanistan is located at the crossroads of Asia and is often referred to as the 'heart of Asia', so it would not be inappropriate to compare the relationship of the Hazaras to Afghanistan with that of the heart to the body.

The study of an isolated people and society, such as the Hazaras, is bound to be fraught with complexities. At the same time, because of the very socio-political system holding power in Afghanistan the study of the Hazaras had until recently been discouraged to the extent that they have remained unknown, as a people, to many of their fellow countrymen. The very presence of such complexities and obstacles, however, render such a study ever more exciting, enlightening and desirable, though frustrating and sad. This study is by way of an effort in the direction of redressing the present intellectual imbalance. In the following pages I have adopted an entirely new approach to the study of the Hazaras and have undertaken a discussion of issues which may prove controversial. As we say in Farsi 'the truth is bitter', and I fear that under the present circumstances I may be accused of bearing bitter fruit.

The thesis is divided into seven chapters, plus an introduction and a conclusion, making in all nine chapters. The introduction provides the point of entry to our discussion by raising issues and questions which will be addressed throughout the rest of the text; issues such as the problem of 'national identity' in Afghanistan, or changing the name of Khorasan to Afghanistan. The introduction also provides the theoretical framework underlying the new approach, through which alone in my opinion, it is possible to comprehend and gain access to the Hazara people and their society, and to Afghanistan. The general background and questions outlined here pre-empt the correct reading and understanding of the chapters which follow, with the aim of pointing the reader in the right direction towards finding the answers to the questions posed.

Chapter one deals with the debate on the origin of the Hazaras. Although this debate has up to now followed a traditional line of enquiry, here I have attempted to classify the various existing views, to summarize critically each in turn, and finally to arrive at a new conclusion. Debates on the origins of all human groups are on the whole based largely on non-verifiable suppositions, and rarely lend themselves to finite conclusions. What I hope to have achieved here is to arrive, by looking critically at existing theories, at a more plausible view.

Chapter two looks at the cultural and social structure of the Hazaras, discussing religion, language, art, social structure, population and geographical location. Here I have taken a critical look especially at the views currently held on the religion, population and geographical location of the Hazaras, in order to propose a new understanding of the significance of these factors. Chapter three looks at the socio-political relations and mode of production of Hazara society. Here I consider agriculture, animal husbandry, commerce, and industry in the Hazarajat, and go on to outline and analyse the socio-economic changes that have taken place in Hazara society over approximately the last one hundred years.

Chapter four, which covers the most important and influential period in the recent social history of the Hazaras, looks at the socio-political transformation which has taken place since the tragic events of the 1890s, analysing their causes and consequences. Here, I review three existing analyses of these events, highlighting the particular weaknesses and shortcomings of the first two theories.

Chapter five looks at the social changes in Hazara society after the events of the 1890s, studying in particular Hazara communities which have formed outside of Afghanistan since that time. Chapter six moves on to look at the development of Hazara society between 1919 and 1978, revealing the tragic conditions endured by the Hazaras during these years; conditions the extent of which will come as a surprise even to many people in Afghanistan itself.

Chapter seven, which is the last major chapter of the thesis, reviews and analyses the social conditions, changes and developments in Hazara society, the new role of the Hazaras in the struggle for resistance which has been taking place since 1978, and the totally unexpected resurgence of the Hazaras since that time as one of the most significant political parties active in determining the future shape of Afghanistan. Finally, the conclusion firstly provides a summary of the

principal issues discussed, and secondly outlines the importance and indeed necessity of the study of the Hazaras, emphasizing particularly the significant role to be played by them in the future of Afghanistan.

LIDIA DINA SCIAMA, *Relations between Centre and Periphery in the City of Venice: A Study of Venetian Life in a Lagoon Island*. D.Phil. (Thesis restricted until June 1997.)

This thesis is an anthropological study of the island of Burano and of its interaction with Venice. In the first part I analyse economic and cultural factors that characterized Venice's modernization and examine the reasons why industrial development in the internal coast of the Venetian gulf is now generally viewed as the main cause of the city's environmental problems. Due to its position near the north-eastern margins of the lagoon, Burano, which is often described as 'an island of fishermen and lacemakers', was at first excluded both from the benefits and from the disturbing changes brought about by industrialization. However, at present its inhabitants fully share in the consequences of pollution and the decay of architectural fabric that have affected Venice's historical centre. Buranelli's negotiations with the city's bureaucrats are often conducted in a defensive manner, and, while they generally take pride in being Venetian, they at the same time hold a strong sense of a separate collective identity, and they often express a feeling of difference, especially, as they maintain, in their attitudes to kinship and to social and family structure.

In the second part of the thesis I examine the history of Burano's lacemaking. The nature of relations between the craftswomen and their managers, mostly from outside the island, illustrates ways in which the organizers aspired to exercise full control over the workers' sexuality as well as over their productive activity. Discipline was largely based on a strong emphasis on 'shame'. For the Buranelli, however, 'shame' is not conceived of as a counterpart to 'conscience', but is itself one of its manifestations—since it derives from strong internalization and awareness of religious and behavioural norms. Although, by combining a patriarchal outlook with Christian attitudes to female virtue, the enforcement of shame apparently aided the men's control over their wives and daughters, pressure on the women to behave according to norms imposed from outside the island ultimately undermined the men's self-esteem.

Gradually, since World War Two, Burano's lacemakers have largely dispensed with the mediation of outsiders and of conventual institutions and have successfully entered an international lace market. Nevertheless, memories of past poverty, exploitation and shame have acquired a strong political dimension, and still frequently affect the islanders' relations with Venice. The Buranelli's rejection of earlier hegemonies thus shows how, in societies in which honour is a prominent value, isolation and poverty, as well as awareness of others' negative

perceptions of their sexual behaviour, may all be contributing factors in the formation of collective identities.

GREGORY VAN ALSTYNE, *The Poetics of a Bilingual Community in Malawi: A Study of the Sung Poetry of Malonje Village*. D.Phil.

This monograph is based upon one year of anthropological fieldwork conducted in Malonje village, Zomba, Malawi during the period October 1988 to October 1989. During the course of this fieldwork I collected over 500 verbal art texts of which, at present, over 420 have been transcribed from tape, translated, and provided with exegetical commentary. Almost all of these have been performed by women. None of them have ever been committed to print. That is, this corpus of texts comprises an oral tradition.

This thesis concentrates upon an analysis of the poetical forms of the texts, indigenous conceptions of their generic classification, their mode of performance in specific social contexts, and what modes of thought (derived from statements and ideas about contextual appropriateness, performative style, content and aesthetic evaluation) may be manifested in such examples of verbal artistry. All of these aspects indeed occur within a wider world of social, economic and political forces which are both mirrored in the content of these texts but also affect the social composition of their performance. In other words, these poetical forms are part and parcel of the everyday life of the village, its political structure, its economic needs and its system(s) of belief.

The main purpose of this study is to examine how the verbal artistry contained in the corpus of Malonje sung poetry is expressed, in what ways it embodies a system of poetics, and how it is conceived and practised by those who perform it. All of the texts provided as examples in order to demonstrate various points made in the main body of the thesis are excerpts from full compositions transcribed from tapes of their *actual rendition* in performance. Attention to their exactness of transcription has been emphasized in order to highlight the creative impulses, innovative quirks of fancy, and performative vagaries of live public renditions of verbal art works, which, if left to 'cleaned up' and condensed versions acceptable to implicit Western aesthetic tastes, might otherwise, indeed would, miss out on how the creative process is engendered by and takes place in actual performance.

In fact, regional divergences such as the pronunciation of 'w' in place of the characteristic dental fricative 'w̥' have been retained if rendered in such a way during live performance. In like manner ungrammaticalities have been faithfully recorded and represented in transcription. Extratextual insertions having nothing to do with the main body of the verbal art work but everything to do with its performance have also been included. The full compositions from which these examples have been excerpted along with their exegeses are supplied in an appendix provided for each chapter.



Malonje village is multiethnic and bilingual. This fact derives in part from the propinquity of the village to the former colonial seat of political power (indeed, the Malawian Parliament still convenes in Zomba at certain times of the year), its historical prominence as a crossroads to different migrating ethnic groups, and its inclusion in a major population zone recording the highest population density in Malawi. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that the oral texts collected from this village have been rendered for the most part (a few have been sung in Arabic and Chilomwe) in the two major regional languages, Chinyanja and Chiyao. In many instances these songs may be expressed in both languages during the same performance. For example, a folk narrative told to an audience of mixed ethnic background in Chinyanja may (and usually does) feature songs sung by the main protagonists of the story in Chiyao, this in spite of carrying on dramatic dialogue in the former language.

The content of this corpus of sung poetry is wide in scope as well as diverse. As this region of Malawi has served as migration route and settling point for several ethnic groups the provenance of many of the texts collected has been from elsewhere in the region. For instance, several waves of Yao migrants/refugees from Mozambique have settled in Malonje village over the past few decades. Mention is made in songs to the war raging on the other side of the nearby border from whence some of the recorded singers have fled. Other current topics such as literacy, women's development and AIDS are mentioned in these texts as well as the enduring topics of witchcraft, sorcery, kin relations, marriage, migrant labour, and endemic hunger. Views of everyday life and the pressing concerns of the contemporary Malawian world all find their place in the content and idiom of poetic expression as voiced by the people of Malonje village.

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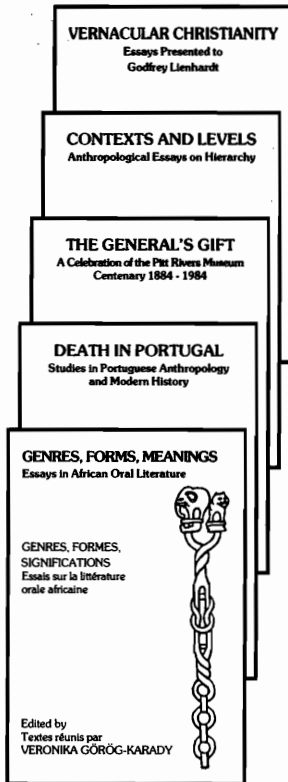
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