

BOOK REVIEWS

PENNY VAN ESTERIK, *Materializing Thailand*, Oxford: Berg 2000. 274 pp., Illustration, Bibliography, Index. £42.99/£14.99.

Thailand suffers from a dual image, as the land of smiles and the land of problems. It is an exotic place, full of monks, temples, and tradition, and simultaneously a country with some of the worst social problems in the world. Whether it is AIDS, child prostitution, uncontrolled and irresponsible tourism, pollution, drug-trafficking, or urbanization, Thailand serves as useful exemplar, even a warning, of the dangers inherent in modernization and capitalism.

Despite this enormous scope for research, Thailand has long been an unfashionable and under-researched country in anthropological terms, especially as far as British anthropologists are concerned. As van Esterik asks, 'Why have so few works on Thailand been designated theoretical, and why has Thai ethnography not informed anthropological theory nor become part of the canon?' (p. 13). Part of the reason is that although there have been excellent books on Thai village life and the centrality of Buddhism to Thai society, Thailand is generally better known through campaigning groups who have emphasised the seedier aspects of Thailand but rarely attempted to understand its multi-faceted complexity. But although Thailand is a series of problems and a collection of issues which generate international concern, and much more rarely a site for anthropological research, the gap between these two positions could be usefully explored. Thailand is not alone in experiencing rapid modernization with its attendant industrialisation and change from a rural- to urban-based economy. So why has Thailand become symbolic of so much that is bad?

This book attempts to answer some of these questions by focusing on the roles and representations of women in modern Thailand and on the construction of femininity. She examines how the beauty and sexuality of Thai women have been closely tied to national pride and social cohesion, and how the importance of beauty, whether as a reflection of Buddhist merit or of Thai models of femininity, is central to understanding the contemporary concerns of Thai society. If issues such as AIDS and prostitution are to be understood from a Thai perspective, they need to be understood in the context of Buddhism and of the construction of gender in Thailand.

By stressing representations, van Esterik avoids essentialism and simplification. She emphasizes the complexities of Buddhism and Buddhist teaching. Buddhism is not a monolithic entity, and the factions within Buddhism and its various interpretations are discussed at length. Thai Buddhism is not a scripture-based religion, and consequently there is an enormous variety of interpretation of Buddhist texts and teaching on gender. Relying solely on the monasteries as the face of authentic Thai Buddhism is clearly problematic. Yet Buddhism informs and explains women's roles in Thailand, and the complexity of the links between them is explored at length. In contrast to other authors, who have either blamed Buddhism for prostitution in Thailand or denied any

link at all, she examines the interplay between Buddhism, the state, and the construction of gender, and argues convincingly for the need to understand Buddhism in its many manifestations as an influence on how Thai women see themselves and how they are perceived by the state and society.

Van Esterik pays particular attention to surfaces and to the importance of what might be interpreted elsewhere as superficial aspects. The gap between the actual and the ideal may be great, but this book rightly makes no claim that one of these is any more authentic or real than the other. Indeed, this work is premised on the importance of appearances, of 'keeping face' and appropriateness. This is shown most clearly when looking at representations and constructions of gender, as it is Thai women who bear the brunt of this social pressure. During the Second World War, therefore, when Thailand was trying to position itself as closer to the West than to Japan, Thai women were ordered to wear hats and Western clothing and to kiss their husbands goodbye as they set off to work ('Wear a hat for your country; hats will lead Thailand to greatness', quoted p. 103). More recently, the emphasis has been on wearing 'traditional' Thai outfits, especially in tourist brochures promoting 'exotic', and to tourists presumably authentic, Thailand under the tourist authority's new slogan of 'Amazing Thailand'. Thai nationalism has become mapped on to women's bodies and displayed through their dress and their behaviour. Given this, it is not surprising that the government has done little to end sex tourism, and has actually encouraged it for the tourist dollars it brings in and the revenue it earns the country. It is only when an international outcry was raised over child prostitution that the government made any attempt to end the use of women's bodies to boost its GNP.

Prostitution is an important aspect of this book, but it is one of van Esterik's strengths that she does not see prostitution as a straightforward reflection of the role of women in Thai society. As she points out, 'an analysis of Thai prostitution has often substituted for analysis of gender relations in Thailand, as if explaining Thai prostitution were adequate for understanding the position and condition of Thai women. There is a great danger in using prostitution as a proxy measure of women's status in Thailand. There is an even greater danger in separating our prostitution as a social problem or a health problem, and isolating it from other gender issues' (p. 85). Prostitution may well be one of the most visible roles that Thai women play, especially in the international tourist market, but it cannot be seen independently from their roles as daughters, wives, mothers, citizens, and Buddhists. This book is an impressive examination of gender in contemporary Thailand which avoids either idealizing or pathologizing it.

HEATHER MONTGOMERY

MUKULIKA BANERJEE, *The Pathan Unarmed: Opposition and Memory in the North-West Frontier*, Oxford: James Currey 2000. x, 238 pp., Bibliography, Plates, Index. £40.00/£16.95.

The Pathan Unarmed is an important book for scholars of Pathan culture. It is not, by any means, a replacement for previous ethnographies, since Banerjee focuses on what

is apparently a cultural anomaly. It is interesting precisely because it describes a situation in which a group of people seemingly violated their own cultural codes. For this reason, Banerjee's work can only truly be appreciated within the context of earlier studies of Pathan culture. South Asian scholars whose research is focused elsewhere in the sub-continent would also be well advised to read this book. Much attention has been paid to the leaders of the nationalist movement, such as Gandhi, Nehru, or Jinnah, but Banerjee shows how one successful leader employed pre-existing popular values and concepts to serve new purposes. These new purposes, and the values which supported them, were not incompatible with wider nationalist movements in other parts of India. This book will hopefully cause South Asianists to reconsider critically certain implied divisions between so-called tribal and peasant groups. The values held by culture groups must be treated with considerable care. Banerjee provides an elegant demonstration of how cultural values may be adapted to a wider variety of expression than social analysts might otherwise predict.

Banerjee addresses a particularly intriguing puzzle in South Asian history. How did a group of notoriously aggressive Pathans (or Pukhtuns) create and sustain a non-violent nationalist movement? Using a combination of oral histories and archival data, Banerjee has reconstructed a highly readable account of the leadership and following of the Khudai Khidmatgar (the 'Servants of God') movement, which lasted from 1930 to 1947. The KK, or Red Shirt movement as the British referred to it, has been discussed in some South Asian literature, though up to now the focus has always been on the founder and leader of the movement, Abdul Gaffar Khan, more popularly known as Badshah Khan. He has been called the Frontier Gandhi because of his close friendship with Gandhi and his non-violent nationalist beliefs. Treatment of the KK leader has invariably centred on his close relationship with Mahatma Gandhi and neglected his independent conversion to non-violence, which Banerjee tells us occurred well before he became aware of Gandhi's movement. *The Pathan Unarmed* examines not only Badshah Khan's role as a charismatic leader but also the reasons why Pathans were prepared to redefine longstanding traditional values. Banerjee shows how Badshah Khan was able to adapt *pukhtunwali*, the moral code of Pathan culture, to render non-violent protest an indigenously approved course of action.

The strength of Banerjee's account is in her use of oral histories collected from former members of the KK movement. She cites seventy separate interviews with KK members ranging in age from seventy to 120–130 years. These oral accounts are treated critically and are supported for the most part by relevant archival information from colonial records. Through these stories, Banerjee builds a picture of Badshah Khan as a man as well as a leader of a nationalist political movement. Many KK members, for example, distinctly recall Badshah Khan's speeches and their own feelings about them. They explain how Badshah Khan taught them that highly prized social institutions like the blood feud had to be abandoned. Their collective energies had to be redirected to a different kind of *jihad*, or holy war, which was to be fought on the more demanding spiritual level. It would, of course, have been wholly inadequate simply to reproduce Badshah Khan's speeches or sections of his autobiography. It is in the sense that his followers gave to these ideas that offers an understanding of the ways in which a people may be persuaded to alter radically how they express their own cultural values.

Banerjee builds on the ethnographies of Barth, Ahmed, and Lindholm to show how violence need not always be considered an integral aspect of *pukhtunwali*. Contemporary stereotypes of Pathans in Pakistan continue to reinforce the idea that Pathans are quick to resort to violence and bloodshed. Pathan masculinity is commonly thought to demand that a man be prepared to fight. Banerjee, following Lindholm, shows instead that the willingness to suffer extreme consequences was an indigenously approved expression of honour and masculinity. Going to jail became a sign of a brave and honourable person. KK members adopted the idea that one could express greater courage by facing one's enemy unarmed because it increased the risk of personal injury to oneself. The KK movement managed to incorporate indigenous values and show how non-violence was not only a more effective protest, but a more courageous and noble expression of these values. That the movement endured for seventeen years suggests that it had indeed tapped into a set of indigenously approved cultural norms.

The one disappointment was Banerjee's brief treatment of the expression of colonialism through homoerotic sexuality. Unfortunately, she relies on Nandy's critique of colonialism and expands on notions of the effeminisation of the 'native'. This seems to rely far too much on giving primacy to an interpreted set of meta messages behind what people actually said and did. Even if Nandy and Banerjee are correct that British men secretly desired Indian men, then I still fail to see the utility of this line of analysis. No one has effectively demonstrated that homoerotic desire was a primary motivating factor for British behaviour in India, but perhaps I hold a minority view on this issue. Happily for me, Banerjee does not dwell on the sexuality of colonialism, and the rest of the book is an unproblematic pleasure to read.

Methodologically, Banerjee provides a valuable discussion of the ways anthropologists may effectively employ oral histories. Mainstream historians, she tells us, are sceptical of personal memories, as they are often highly contextualised in contemporary situations. Memories are not only about the past but may be reconstructed to suit the needs of the present. The passages in which she justifies her heavy reliance on informant's memories and her explanation of the ways she was able to cross-check her data provide a useful reference for anyone intent on investigating recent historical events. There are limitations to what may be done with material of this sort, though as Banerjee's book demonstrates, what one may do is sufficiently worthwhile to justify the effort.

STEVEN LYON

THOMAS BLOM HANSEN, *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1999. vi, 293 pp., Glossary, Bibliography, Index. £29.95/£10.95/\$49.50/\$17.95.

Hindu nationalism is a key aspect of contemporary Indian political and cultural discourse. It is not in itself, however, a new phenomenon. Hansen traces its immediate origins to the foundation of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) youth movement in 1944, which itself drew inspiration from the Aryo Samaj of the late nineteenth cen-

tury. Unlike the Aryo Samaj, the RSS still flourishes as a cultural and educational (or training) movement promoting the notion of *hindutva* (roughly, 'Hinduness') as a cultural, civilizational, and national idea rather than a strictly religious one, at the same time also seeing itself as apolitical. Only later, in 1964, did the Vishwa Hindu Parishad arise as an organization seeking to find as much common ground as possible between the religions 'of Indian soil', including Buddhism and Sikhism—which hardly makes even this a devotional or confessional movement of Hinduism *per se*. Later still, in April 1980, came political organization through the Bharatiya Janata Party, which its leaders A. B. Vajpayee and L. K. Advani soon expanded away from its middle-class and upper-caste origins into social space occupied mostly by the lower-status Other Backward Classes. The party formed two short-lived governments in the late 1990s, taking advantage of the decline of Congress in the wake of the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi and the (temporary) eclipse of the Gandhi dynasty.

Hansen's introduction is largely taken up with developing a neo-Lacanian perspective, with side references to Bourdieu and Foucault. Later chapters are largely historical, with explanations of the movement's philosophies together with some ethnographic accounts of particular situations. From them emerge the anti-Christian and especially anti-Muslim nature of the movement (the latter being seen in terms of historical conversions of low-caste Hindus, the loss of Pakistan etc.), the development and focality of the god Ram as a unifying symbol, the movement's balancing act between demonstrations and processions on the one hand and illegal forms of direct action (such as the destruction of the Ayodhya mosque) on the other, and the essential modernity of the movement in respect of its nationalism and belief in economic autarchy and military prowess (it is noticeable that Hansen nowhere uses the term 'fundamentalist').

In his sixth chapter, Hansen rejects journalistic theses that the popular protests associated with the movement are simply the mob action of an incorrigible underclass being manipulated by evil, clever outsiders, which he sees as a hangover of an essentially colonialist perspective. Instead, he argues that a largely imagined construction of Muslims as an 'other' enjoying various advantages, not only as a cosseted minority but also because of their supposed access to wives and progeny through polygyny (now outlawed for Hindu men) and Middle Eastern wealth. The moral superiority that Hindus accord themselves is therefore linked to jealousy and a loss of enjoyment in comparison to Muslims—the immoral accrue advantages that the moral are denied. This position is reciprocated almost exactly by Muslims and can be traced in other ethnic or communal conflicts. Particular local issues are significant, but they act more as the trigger and do not create such 'imaginaries' themselves.

The more theoretical parts of the book suffer from a fashionable impenetrability at times, and the ethnographic parts are quite thin, forming appendages to the text rather than being integrated into it (admittedly, Hansen appears professionally to be a geographer rather than an anthropologist). Nonetheless, on the whole this is a worthwhile account of a much misunderstood and feared movement, one which may have peaked temporarily but still aspires to make the twenty-first century 'a Hindu century'. We now have no excuse for seeing its more violent aspects as one of the occasional but inexplicable aberrations of life in a hot climate, as the Raj did. Hansen shows them to be quite normative in some cases and areas, and certainly as being underpinned by a

quite transparent symbolic discourse, which is nationalist and modern rather than religious or fundamentalist (BJP deputy leader L. K. Advani apparently prides himself on never going to a temple). Like other so-called 'fundamentalisms', *hindutva* is forward-looking rather than regressive, despite its ideological rooting in a constructed history.

ROBERT PARKIN

JOHANNES MARIA HÄMMERLE, *Nias - eine eigene Welt: Sagen, Mythen, Überlieferungen* (Collectanea Instituti Anthropos 43), Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag 1999. 407 pp., Maps, Tables, Figures, Plates, Bibliography, List of informants. DM 88.00.

This is the first of two planned volumes devoted to myths on the island of Nias, which lies south-west of Sumatra in Indonesia. The first volume presents material from north and central Nias, material from south Nias being reserved for the second volume. These circumstances make difficulties for a reviewer, as some of the author's arguments are left for completion in the second book. It should be said at once that the author is a Catholic priest of the Capuchin order who has been a missionary on Nias since 1972. If I read his foreword correctly, he has had no training in anthropology.

The structure of the book is as follows. The introduction provides geographical and historical orientation. The second chapter presents myths from north Nias, followed by a chapter on central Nias myths, and a long concluding chapter which discusses a series of themes found in the myths. Hämmerle reinterprets three previously published myths and presents thirteen new myths collected by himself, but only in German translation. A principal ambition is to demythologize Nias myth. By this phrase, as the author explains, he intends to demythologize the published literature on Nias myth, because white authors took the figurative and symbolic language of the myths too literally. 'Too quickly, therefore, were conclusions drawn, a crowd of gods discovered, and finally an attempt made to order these in a system.' Further, he wishes to peel away the outer shell of the myths to reveal the real core, the content, the actual statement of the myths.

Only an expert on Nias can judge the accuracy of Hämmerle's individual arguments. It may be said, however, that the results are much as one might expect, given the ambitions. There is not much in the way of an overall argument, nor is there any reference to any general anthropological literature that might be deemed relevant. Instead, in addition to the translations, the book proceeds by very detailed factual elucidation of the ethnographic content of the myths. Hämmerle identifies and characterizes each of his informants, so that a sense of diversity is preserved, which nevertheless does not obscure the fact that there are common cultural features. A non-expert can expect to get only so much out of this book. Despite the wealth of factual detail, he may feel a lack in terms of sufficient explanations of ethnographic contexts. Above all, a glossary and an index would have been of great help.

A great deal of care and scholarship has gone into this book, which is very attractively decorated with numerous drawings. At the end there are fifteen beautiful photographs, twelve of which are in colour. The majority of the myths are new material and

therefore an important contribution in their own right. Of course, the ethnographic elucidations are necessary as well. The impression the reader receives, that for the most part the book consists of a series of sometimes none too closely related topics, may be corrected by reading of the second volume when it appears. In any case, it is hardly fair to judge an overall project when one has read only half of the results.

R. H. BARNES

CHRISTIAN FEEST (ed.), *Indians and Europe: An Interdisciplinary Collection of Essays*, Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press 1999. 643 pp., Plates, Name index. £19.95.

This collection is a reprint of a book originally published in English in Aachen, Germany, in 1987. The focus of the book is European interest in and experiences of native Americans. Although in his preface the editor implies that only North American Indians are of concern, one contribution deals with the Brazilian Indian Quoniambec and another is devoted to the Gê-speaking Brazilian Botocudo. Nor are all the authors or actors citizens of European countries. These circumstances indicate a liberal interpretation of the question of European relationships with American Indians.

The 33 chapters in this collection cover a correspondingly great diversity of topics. However, in no sense could this book be presented as comprehensive. With the two exceptions noted above, nothing presented here deals with the Americas south of the present United States. The Spanish chronicles, French accounts of travel and exploration, and the Jamestown colonists are all neglected, although Feest lightly touches on these matters in his concluding chapter. Standard works such as Lafitau on the Iroquois go unmentioned. The merit of this work, therefore, rests on the originality of the material in it.

The editor writes, 'A simple explanation for the reasons of the special relationship between Europeans and the native populations of North America is that no such relationship exists. Under close scrutiny it becomes apparent that all that interested and still interests Europeans is "Indians", a wholly fictional population inhabiting the Old World mind rather than the New World land.' He also comments that much the same is true of the largely derivative notions of white Americans.

Specific contributions range over quite disparate topics. Among them are wild men in sixteenth-century book illustrations, the kidnapping of Eskimos for display in Europe, the legitimate and illegitimate exportation of North American Indians and Eskimos for touring exhibitions, George Catlin's and Buffalo Bill's tours with Indians from various tribes, Charles Dickens' fantasies about American Indians he never met, representations of Indians in central European countries which had even less chance to encounter them, and genuine encounters by such figures as Jonathan Carver and William Blackmore. One chapter bravely attempts to describe American Indian perceptions of Europe, on rather spotty evidence, it must be said. Others deal with attempts to enlist European interest in Indian political appeals. A very useful chapter establishes the authorship of an unconscious literary fraud which has been taken up by the eco-

logical movement as Chief Seattle's speech, the original having had nothing to do with these issues. Also included is a chapter on weekend 'Indians' in Frankfurt, Germany, and another on a brief 1977 Italian movement of deluded Marxists who thought themselves to be metropolitan Indians.

The predominant theme throughout is the persistence of fixed stereotypes which inhibit genuine understanding of and interest in the diverse peoples Europeans see as American Indians. To this miscomprehension may be linked the appalling callousness with which 'Indians' were sometimes treated. Then too, 'Indians' occasionally provided opportunities for the expression of purely European chauvinisms and political obsessions. Even Nazi Germans identified with 'Indians' in a way Germans have never identified with Jews, Africans, or Turks. 'Indians' expressed everything that is noble in the German character. Naturally, a good deal of attention is given that German myth-maker Karl May: although he never left Germany, he claimed fluency in ten native American languages. His wife related an embarrassing moment when, on being introduced to Indians in Buffalo Bill's show, he nattered away at them in a false language until Buffalo Bill shut him up. Most useful is the editor's shrewd concluding chapter. As Feest states, 'What seems to characterize the European relationship to the "Indian" is the willingness to accept the expectation raised by the likewise European prediction that the Indian has a "message". People are willing to listen to the most absurd statements if validated by Indianness.'

R. H. BARNES

ROBERT A. SEGAL, *Theorizing about Myth*, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press 1998. 184 pp., Index. £15.99.

This collection of Segal's essays, most of which were first published in America in the 1990s, concentrates on presenting the theories of individual mythologists. The author, now Professor of Religious Studies at Lancaster, works mostly by contrasting the views of one writer with those of one or more others. The arrangement of the book is broadly historical: Tylor, the earliest figure to be considered, is given chapter 1, while Joseph Campbell and the German Hans Blumenberg, who were active a century later, are treated at the end. The book certainly tells one a good deal about the history of writing on myth, but it does not attempt to narrate a continuous story, and is not at all concerned with situating the theorists within their social, political, or intellectual contexts. Nor is it clear whether the author himself changed any of his views between the earliest essay, published in 1987, and the latest (1998): reflexivity is ignored.

One reason why myth is such a difficult area to treat satisfactorily is the range of relevant disciplines: anthropology certainly, but also theology, classics and other philologies, psychoanalysis, philosophy, folklore etc. Another type of problem is definition. The *Année sociologique* writers recommended researchers to start on a subject by formulating preliminary definitions that would enable them to recognise the phenomena they wanted to study in depth: certainly myth is hard to pin down. No doubt the prototype notion is a narrative involving sacred agents, but neither 'sacred' nor 'narra-

tive' are easily delimited, and the notion tails off in various directions. It is not clear where myth fades into legend or folk tale, or belief or stereotype, not how to classify cosmologies (such as a three-level universe) or the corresponding temporal schemata (like the four ages of Hinduism). The definitional problem attracts little attention here. Segal sees 'the fundamental questions about myth [as] what is its origin, what is its function, what is its subject matter' (p. 2). Such formulations seem to presuppose a unitary concept, untouched by deconstructionist concerns over reification, but it is far from obvious that any single theory will be equally applicable to everything that people have labelled 'myth'.

Perhaps the definitional problem was glossed over by the theorists in question. For this is very much a book about theories rather than the myths themselves, and it is essentially about other people's theories. Only one chapter, on the Greek myth of Adonis, forms an exception on both counts, since it offers the author's own theory about a particular myth. The result of the concentration on theory is a somewhat rarified and abstract tone. For instance, we are seldom told how much knowledge the theorists possessed of actual myths or from what part of the world those myths came. As for the choice of theorists, there is no reference to Roland Barthes's *Mythologies*, nor to Dumézil, and although Lévi-Strauss is mentioned, he is not treated in depth.

The strength of the book lies in its interrogation of what the selected theorists said, and failed to say, and in the rich bibliographies provided. At the risk of arbitrariness and oversimplification, here are some of the points that arise from the complex discussion. Tylor, the intellectualist, makes a nice clear starting-point with his emphasis on myth as offering explanations of the course of nature. Frazer is much less clear, implicitly changing his views as the different editions of the *Golden Bough* come out. Contrary to the three-stage model usually ascribed to him, he was primarily concerned with the mixed magic-religion evolutionary stage located between the purely religious stage and the later scientific one; this was when the death and rebirth of vegetation became related to the transmission of kingship. In the history of the tangled debate on the relationship between myth and ritual, Frazer follows Robertson Smith (who gives priority to behaviour over belief) and precedes many British theorists, such as Jane Harrison at Cambridge or Sidney Hooke—who, however, do not necessarily follow or even understand him closely. An interesting chapter discusses Jessie Weston's Frazerian interpretation of the Grail legend, which she tried to trace back to gnosticism and ancient Nature Cults; but perhaps her influence on T. S. Eliot (not noted here) was the most important outcome of such speculation.

Among the psychoanalysts, Bruno Bettelheim is criticised for his neglect of the earlier literature written by fellow Freudians and his paradoxical attitude to the relationship between myths and fairy-tales, while Jung receives respectful treatment in the longest essay of the book. As might be expected, Jung links myths with processes that take place in the mind rather than the world: 'Myths are original revelations of the pre-conscious psyche, involuntary statements about unconscious psychic happenings, and anything but allegories of physical processes'. Full psychic maturity demands reconnecting oneself to the unconscious and its archetypes. In Detienne's Lévi-Straussian analysis of the Adonis myth, burnt-cooked-raw parallels promiscuity-marriage-celibacy, and Adonis represents the extremes as against the central element. Segal prefers a Jungian approach in which the youth expresses the *puer* archetype: his failure to

grow up—to marry and participate in society—functions as a negative example and a warning to the citizens of a polis. All this provides a striking contrast to the following chapter on hero myths, which compares the views of the Freudian Otto Rank, the eclectic but somewhat Jungian Campbell and the essentially Frazerian Lord Raglan. As so often, the author here leaves implicit his own views on the category (which appears to me Euro- or Indo-Europocentric). Moreover, in the next chapter, after listing seven what might seem fairly devastating criticisms of Campbell, Segal paradoxically ends by claiming that this widely read author ‘merits much praise’ and ‘offers an important introduction to the subject’.

Many other theories are briefly surveyed, including those of Eliade, Jonas (the specialist on gnosticism), and Bultmann (the existentialist demythologiser of the New Testament), but the reader may well be left wondering whether the time is yet ripe for satisfactory general theories. Of all the bodies of myth in the world, the most studied must be that of the Indo-European speakers, but it still requires an immense amount of comparative work. When such work has been carried further, and when even more work of a similar type has been done on other groups (Sino-Tibetans, Austronesians, Australians, Inuit etc.), we shall be in a far stronger position to propose plausible and empirically adequate theories of myth—assuming the term stands the test of time.

N. J. ALLEN

JADWIGA PSTRUSIŃSKA, *Old Celtic Cultures from the Hindu Kush Perspective*, Cracow: Universitas 1999. 194 pp., Bibliography. No price given.

The intriguing title reflects the author’s intellectual history. Originally a specialist in Afghanistan, she was affiliated to Kabul University during the 1970s and now teaches at the Jagiellonian University. A visit to the White Horse at Uffington during the summer equinox in 1989 stimulated an interest in Celtic Studies and led to the establishment of a Celto-Asiatic Seminar in Cracow. It must also have led to a great deal of reading, or at least consultation, for this relatively short text (say 55,000 words) has a bibliography of more than 500 entries, mostly books.

A priori one might expect to find certain similarities between the two cultures in question. The early Celtic world is accessible to us mainly from comparative linguistics, archaeology, the descriptions of the Greeks and Romans, and then, after the introduction of Christianity by St Patrick in the fifth century, from the copious literature in Old Irish, which tells us a good deal about the pagan past. There emerges a picture of petty kingdoms with strongly patrilineal kin groups, often raiding and fighting each other, non-literate, but with a massive oral tradition of law and a polytheistic religion. The Celts, roughly speaking, form the western end of the Indo-European-speaking domain, while the eastern end is formed by the Indo-Iranians, among whom the linguists distinguish three branches. Two of them, the Iranian and Indo-Aryan, developed the major literate traditions of Zoroastrianism and Hinduism, whose comparison is a long-established undertaking among philologists. But sandwiched between these two giants, relatively isolated in the mountains of the Hindu Kush, are the Nuristani speak-

ers. Here the accessible material comes only from the last two centuries, but it shows us (before Islamisation a century back) an area of warlike tribals with a pantheon and mythology distinct from those of the neighbouring civilisations. Comparison between the Iron Age Celts and the Nuristanis of 1890 might well be rewarding, and could build on a point that goes back at least to Vendryes, writing in 1918: the western and eastern extremities of the Indo-European world were particularly conservative in their religious vocabulary and institutions, partly no doubt because of the powerful priestly tradition maintained by Druids and Brahmans. Such large-scale insights have not remained entirely unexplored. Myles Dillon's *Celts and Aryans* (Simla: IAS 1975) is a classic, and the Nuristanis are beginning to be incorporated into the Indo-European comparativist literature (N. J. Allen, 'Some gods of pre-Islamic Nuristan', *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 1991, Vol. 208, pp. 141-68; G. Dumézil, 'Les trois fonctions dans le panthéon des Kafirs', in *Le Roman des jumeaux*, Gallimard 1994, pp. 218-30). Both Ireland and Indo-Iranians figure prominently in Calvert Watkins' study of Indo-European poetic language (*How to Kill a Dragon*, Oxford 1995).

However, Pstrusińska is little interested in common Indo-European heritage between the two areas and does not even refer to Dumézil. For reasons that are not made clear, she prefers instead to explore the role of the Indo-Iranians, or more precisely of the Scythian branch of that people, in 'the crystallisation of Celticity'. That there were contacts between the highly mobile pastoralist Scythians (or allied groups such as Cimmerians) and the Celtic speakers living in Central Europe before they entered Britain is entirely possible, but the early history of all the branches of the Indo-European-speaking world is intensely controversial. There is little discussion here of method, and little sign of critical evaluation of the numerous opinions that are cited. Too much of the argument seems to be based on the surface comparison of words, little attention being paid to established sound changes. Lexical evidence is easy to assemble, but not easy to handle, and this applies especially to ethnonyms and toponyms. It might be said that there is little harm in making etymological suggestions, but in a competitive world, where comparativism is regarded by some as a complete waste of time, there is positive merit in avoiding or minimising whatever might be labelled speculative. The best section here, if one ignores its etymologies, is the list of possible topics for future comparison linking Nuristan and the Celts (pp. 84-94). Let us hope that the author will pursue them without losing sight of the common origin of the two cultural traditions.

N. J. ALLEN

ROBERT DESJARLAIS, *Shelter Blues: Sanity and Selfhood Among the Homeless*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 1997. x, 307 pp., Bibliography, Illustrations, Index.

Shelter Blues is an ethnographic study of the residents of the Station Street Shelter for the homeless mentally ill in downtown Boston. The shelter provides comfort, companionship, and temporary accommodation for approximately fifty residents. It also places them under the power and authority of the Massachusetts Department of Mental

Health. Desjarlais conducted research in the early nineties as part of a larger nationwide project exploring the needs of the mentally ill for effective housing and accommodation. In providing a detailed ethnographic account of the practices of everyday life of those who stayed in the shelter, Desjarlais' broader theoretical concern is with trying to 'sketch what goes into the makings of human subjectivity on the margins of a late modern, post-industrial city at the close of the twentieth century' (p. 10).

Shelter Blues does not follow the standard monographic practice of being divided into distinct chapters, but instead is subdivided into forty-one interconnected sections that move 'nomadically from one theme to another' (p. 6). This 'zigzagging ethnography', as Desjarlais terms it, mirrors the theoretical concerns that inform his work, in which he attempts to delineate the linkages between experience, illness, marginality, and personhood. Moving beyond standard phenomenological description to a concern with developing theoretical understandings of why things are the way they are in relation to broader cultural, historical, and political forces, Desjarlais suggests that such an approach 'can help us not only to describe what people feel, think, or experience but also to grasp how the processes of feeling or experiencing come about through multiple interlocking interactions' (p. 25).

Set up in the early 1980s, the Station Street Shelter is housed on the ground floor of the community mental health building that forms part of the Massachusetts State Service Center. Ambitiously conceived and designed, the Center was officially opened in 1971, despite the fact that core features of the original design were never built. The building that houses the shelter remains in a state of permanent incompleteness, its exterior and interior characterised by 'a maze of winding staircases, cave-like recesses, and a harsh "corduroy" concrete surface', which tends to have a strong affect on many of the residents (p. 50). In pathologising and personifying the building, and reflecting on the 'moods and physiologies' of space (p. 58), Desjarlais demonstrates how the building's rough-textured and abrasive surfaces, its labyrinthine corridors and cavernous spaces—what he calls its 'eccentric irregularities' (p. 44)—reflect the shelter residents' ambiguous relation to the building and to their own positionality within its walls. Desjarlais quotes one resident as saying: 'I think the building is made of people's dreams, and conversations, and minds—and architecture. Yeah. The building has people's emotions in it. When people breathe on to it, when they look at it, or touch it, then what they're feeling goes into it, like that' (p. 63).

The participatory, spatial orientations of residents were often at odds with the more routinised, functional, spatial, and temporal orientations of the staff and visitors, and these and similarly defined disjunctures between the residents and those who are responsible for maintaining the shelter pervade Desjarlais' book. In writing about the phenomenological vagaries of residents' ailments, for example, and the use of medications to treat their illnesses, Desjarlais contrasts the residents' 'existential, corporeally attuned imagery' with the staff's 'psychological, therapeutic idiom' (p. 113). Themes of dispersion, fragmentation, and dissonance pervade these different idioms, but in practice the staff's reliance on pharmaceuticals and diagnosis tended to have the effect of permanently stigmatising the residents as 'psychotic', 'schizophrenic', or otherwise mentally impaired.

In describing the unspoken assumptions that inform Western concepts of the self, Desjarlais outlines the way in which privacy, individuality, and reflexivity are consid-

ered intrinsic to experience, which in turn is often equated with 'consciousness' and 'subjectivity'. In problematising such a position, Desjarlais takes experience to be one form of life among many, and argues against treating it—as many do—as the universal, natural, authentic ground of being. In outlining the complex genealogy of the concept of experience in Western thought, Desjarlais draws parallels with Foucault's work on the discursive 'truth' of sexuality, and suggests that 'discourses of depth, interiority, and authenticity, sensibilities of holism and transcendence, and practices of reading, writing, and storytelling have helped to craft a mode of being known in the modern West as experience: that is, an inwardly reflexive, hermeneutically rich process that coheres through time by way of narrative' (p. 17).

The spatial and orientational metaphors of journeying and movement informs much of Desjarlais' book. He quotes, for example, the Heideggerian adage that 'To experience is to go along a way. The way leads through a landscape' (p. 17). The spatial and temporal ordering of this metaphorical landscape relates to the idea that experience constitutes more than an episodic succession of disconnected events, the spatial journey through the landscape directing experience of past, present, and future towards a mutually constituted narrative of temporal integrity.

In arguing that experience, as a form of life, is one possibility among many, Desjarlais suggests that many of the residents of the shelter live in terms that are often different from experience as defined above. Poverty and homelessness throw into relief aspects of life that many people take for granted, such as integrated experience and narrative structure. Many shelter residents lived lives characterised more by transience and episodic encounters than by the unfolding of temporally integrated and hermeneutically rich experience. Newer residents, principally those who were new to the streets and still involved in looking for jobs and more permanent places to stay, continued to live 'largely within the folds of experience' (p. 21). More permanent residents, however, particularly those suffering from various forms of mental illness, were often more reluctant to leave the shelter and venture out on to the streets, preferring to spend their time in or around the shelter.

In trying to capture this latter mode of existence, Desjarlais quotes one of the residents, who, when asked how she was doing, would often say that she was 'struggling along'. To 'struggle along', according to Desjarlais, implies not only carrying on with difficulty 'against opposition, hitting up against a world filled with noise, voices, bodies, pains, distractions, poverty, displacements, and bureaucratic powers' (p. 19), but also the effort to avoid or get away from the difficulties and dilemmas of everyday life. Many of the more permanent shelter residents 'wavered between wanting to feel more, or less, of the world' (p. 137), and attempted to maintain a balance between mental calm and distraction, a mode of existence characterised by a sense of stasis and timelessness. Pacing up and down, smoking and exchanging cigarettes, talking, sitting in the same spot for hours at a time, and other routinised behaviours were instrumental in this pursuit of equilibrium. For Desjarlais, this emphasis on diverse and variegated modes of existence provides theoretical space for considering the ways in which personhood is constituted through the events and activities of everyday life, rather than being merely shaped by historical and cultural processes.

Throughout *Shelter Blues*, Desjarlais never loses sight of the linkages between the phenomenal and political, and he is particularly good at looking at the way in which

language and the uses to which it is put inform both the strategies of care implemented by the staff, and the tactical use of rhetoric, indirection, and other forms of 'sideways' agency demonstrated by the shelter residents. The rules and regulations of the shelter are set and enforced by the staff. These disciplinary strategies—referred to by Desjarlais as 'a kind of therapeutic capitalism' (p. 177)—are concerned with the future production of healthy, autonomous, socially productive individuals. In keeping with this political, economic, and humanitarian stance, the staff's orientation to language is informed by an ethics of understanding and rationality, and emphasises the propositional function of language. For the residents, by contrast, language often serves as a medium of social action in its own right. The expressive and pragmatic value of words and an ethics of listening inform a semantic order often at odds with the staff's concern with reason, directionality, and mutual comprehension.

The 'zigzagging' nature of Desjarlais' ethnography forms part of a strategy for introducing a degree of disjuncture into the narrative integrity of his own text. It also reflects the unique difficulties of doing fieldwork in a shelter for the homeless mentally ill in which most residents are content to 'keep to themselves in the company of others' (p. 157). Desjarlais' engagement with many of these individuals was of necessity 'transient, unstable, partial' (p. 158). These difficulties notwithstanding, the richness of the fragmentary statements and conversations that illustrate Desjarlais' text provide an important insight into the 'diverse subjectivities and phenomenal worlds' (p. 174) of those individuals 'living on the margins of language, communication, and sociability' (p. 122).

For the most part, the structure of the book works extremely well, although there are occasional moments when the relative brevity of some of the subdivisions does seem to prevent Desjarlais from engaging with particular issues or developing a particular argument in as much depth as he might have done. I am inclined to think, for example, that his suggestion 'that a system of displacement and obscurity, rather than one of confinement and visibility, dominates the politics of homelessness in contemporary Boston and elsewhere' (p. 103) would have benefited from more sustained theoretical elaboration than it receives, if only because this line of argument engages directly with Foucault's more widely known theories of confinement, institutionalisation, and self-making.

Such minor reservations aside, *Shelter Blues* is a valuable contribution to a small but growing body of anthropological material dealing with issues of homelessness and marginalisation. It makes a significant contribution to theoretical debates about selfhood, experience, personhood, language, agency, subjectivity, and the interpersonal and cultural construction of illness, and should be of interest to researchers working on related issues. Ideally, it should also find its way into the offices and on to the desks of mental health professionals and policy makers. On a personal note, *Shelter Blues* challenged me to think about 'the pragmatics of everyday discourse' (p. 209), and to reflect on my own engaged inattentiveness to issues of homelessness and marginality on the city streets I walk everyday on the way to and from the university. I would recommend it to anyone concerned with the conditions of lives meaningfully lived.

DAMIAN WALTER

TAMARA KOHN and ROSEMARY MCKECHNIE (eds.), *Extending the Boundaries of Care: Medical Ethics and Caring Practices*, Oxford and New York: Berg 1999. x, 206 pp., Introduction, References, Index. £14.99.

This edited book of eight essays evolved mostly from a one-day workshop on 'The Ethics of Care', held at Queen Elizabeth House, Oxford, and organized by the editors together with Shirley Ardener, one of the general editors of this excellent series of volumes entitled 'Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Women'. It represents a refreshingly interdisciplinary, scholarly mix of expertise encompassing law, ethics, nursing theory, and anthropology, and addressing a diverse range of issues that challenge the boundaries of care in both conceptualization and practice. Apart from some assumed medical and anthropological knowledge and background reading, it has an easily accessible, clearly written style, with several chapters drawing effectively on personal experience and recent field studies. This suggests a wide potential readership, including not only students of anthropology and the social sciences, but also nursing and medical professionals, health-care policy-makers, and administrators.

The concepts of needs, rights, and policy relating to the ethics and practice of medical and nursing care are addressed thematically under four subheadings: 'Embodying Care', 'Controlling Care', 'Framing Care', and 'Nursing Care'. Each of these is preceded by a brief ethnographic overview written by the editors, who also include a well-balanced introductory chapter setting out a number of traditional assumptions about the concepts of carers and caring that are challenged in this book. Many of the chapters focus on the preventative aspects of health-care provision, such as screening, contraception, and the concept of 'safe sex' in relation to HIV/AIDS discourses.

From an anthropological viewpoint the opening chapter by Judith Okely presents a particularly compelling and, at times, shocking discussion of her personal experience of socio-cultural power relationships between formal and informal carers through her moving account of her mother's misdiagnosis and subsequent terminal illness. Okely also introduces the deeply worrying possibility that her mother's case may have been far from unique in failing to recognise the signs and symptoms of CJD in the elderly patient and wrongfully attributing them to Alzheimer's. The insight and detailed observation of an experienced anthropologist adds a unique dimension not only to the experience of the individual, female, informal carer (and later bereaved relative), but also the individual needs—particularly respect for personal dignity—of the recipient of that care.

Frances Price examines the inadequacies of contemporary health-care provision from quite a different perspective, i.e. the dilemmas facing families following multiple births. The results of a national survey conducted by the author clearly demonstrate where and why the provision of support and care by medical and social services is found to be seriously wanting. This is a situation arising more frequently as assisted conception becomes increasingly successful, therefore raising questions of medical ethics, including biomedical accountability. The multiple medical roles of moral, political, and therapeutic gatekeeper are explored, together with issues involving the re-definition of parental roles. However, these discussions deserve greater attention than they are able to receive in this brief paper, and it is to be hoped that a more substantive piece will be written in due course.

The following two chapters present a shift from the particular difficulties between care givers and care recipients to broader debates concerning rights and responsibilities in controlling care. The first of these chapters, by Andrew Russell, examines the use of the injectable contraceptive, Depo-Provera, using a combined historical and anthropological approach to cross-cultural issues surrounding population control and women's health, and the complexities involved in evaluating and balancing risks and benefits. Marie-Bénédicte Dembour then looks at the very abstract, culture-ridden nature of the language of human rights relating to the provision of health and medical care, taking the UN Declaration of Human Rights as her starting-point. This includes a masterful analytical critique of M. Villey's 'Le Droit et les droits de l'homme' (1983) and of the complex underlying power relationships that underpin the illusory nature of 'rights'.

The third section of the book examines how ideas about care are framed to make them publicly accessible and acceptable, using interview-based studies of behaviour and attitudes as their framework. Helen Lambert's study of hereditary conditions, with its demonstration of the social and ethical implications of pre-clinical screening, provides an interesting practical application of the ideologies explored in the previous two chapters. In it she reveals hidden agendas such as the economies of care that are to a greater or lesser extent determined by therapeutic or technical (commercial) viability, and the scientific, moral, political, and economic debates that surround 'screening'. Rosemary McKechnie focuses on the construction of hierarchies and boundaries within, and between, various interest groups in the world of HIV/AIDS research, highlighting the need to overcome particular failures in communication or in awareness of particular interests and sensitivities to enable research to make a positive contribution to health-care, whilst recognising that 'all research has an impact on the world it objectifies'.

The final section of the book looks at the theory and practice of nursing care. Vangie Bergum explores ethical issues underlying the informing, decision-making, and empowering processes in health care. However, despite engaging in some fascinating discussion, particularly about the theory and philosophy of 'ethics as question', I felt this to be the least satisfactory chapter in terms of missed opportunities. Bergum touches tantalisingly on the contentious aspects of a nurse's role as advocate or mediator between patient and other health-care professionals, as well as the cultural and gender-based dilemmas faced in ethical decision-making. In the chapter that follows, Jan Savage presents some of the findings of a fascinating one-year study of British hospital nurses, using an ethnographic approach to examine the ethic of care and its relationship to perceptions of nursing as an extension to the private, feminine, domestic sphere. She tests her findings against an impressive range of published material on gender and professionalization in nursing, as well as her own previous research concerning kinship, to reveal the construction of a uniqueness in role and relationship between nurses and their patients. Savage describes the 'closeness' and the means by which it is achieved as a 'multilayered abstraction that plays a part across a range of nursing agendas relating to patient care and professional standing', suggesting that this is therapeutic in 'uplifting' and empowering the patient both physically and existentially. However, as with many such studies, the constraints of tightly focusing the research (this concerned an all-male ward, in which the nursing staff was almost exclu-

sively female) suggest that this study might have benefited from being widened out to incorporate other variants which might test the outcomes more effectively.

Extending the Boundaries of Care is a scholarly, topical, thought-provoking, well-edited collection, offering the reader an opportunity to consider a broad interdisciplinary overview of medical and nursing ethics, policy, and practice.

HELEN SWEET

ROBERT BOYD, *The Coming of the Spirit of Pestilence: Introduced Infectious Diseases and Population Decline among Northwest Coast Indians 1774-1874*. Seattle: University of Washington Press 1999. xv, 403 pp., References, Index, Illustrations. \$50.00.

This book covers a range of issues relating to imported diseases and the demography of Indians on the north Pacific coast of the USA at a time when records were first becoming available. It also covers the effects of this depopulation from an estimated 180,000 at the time of contacts with Europeans in 1774 to 35,000 in less than a century. It distinguishes between early virgin-soil epidemics of smallpox that were well spaced out in time, and from which it was possible for communities to recover at least partially, and later endemic diseases such as malaria, from which there could be no periodic recovery and for which the Indians did not have the time to develop their own partial immunities, as has occurred elsewhere. The government's response to smallpox seems to have been quite inadequate, even actively spreading the disease by moving survivors. On the other hand, Anglican and Roman Catholic missionaries vaccinated some thousands on their own initiative, which was a stimulus to conversion as well as to the rise of many nativist religions.

The smallpox epidemics may have had effects analogous to other environmental disasters, such as the failure of the fish migrations. This resulted in a dislocation of the social system, such as the absence of preferred marriage and remarriage partners, thus lowering fertility even further, and of the appropriate categories of people for working parties and ceremonies. For whatever reason, there was also a marked shortage of women. However, these changes did lead to an increase in potlatch activities, as status positions were now vacant, and the numbers involved in competition declined.

Boyd also refers to the unrelenting pressure of malaria, which reduced some populations to the verge of extinction, as mortality was concentrated in the new-born and young, and resulted in maternal anaemia. He makes an important point in suggesting that when early anthropologists started to document the social systems of these small-scale peripheral societies, they had already been suffering from epidemics of imported diseases and thus could hardly represent their 'aboriginal' state. The decline in the birth-rate may also have been connected with venereal disease as well as depression caused by too rapid social change. Some indigenous practices, such as collective mourning ceremonies and the Indian medical technique of treating the sick by making them sweat and giving them cold-water plunges, may have spread epidemic diseases. But the author also suggests that some cultural systems may have had an aboriginal capacity to rebound.

Boyd also discusses the concept of 'epidemic areas', with diseases corresponding to sub-regional social networks, which would explain in part the difference between 60 and 90 per cent mortality rates and the marked differences between regions affected by epidemic infections and those where malaria became epidemic. Finally, he suggests that such horrendous population losses may have caused non-Western cultures to back-track or 'devolve' to simpler forms, enabling them to adapt more easily to changed circumstances. In short, the volume provides a detailed and fascinating study of value to any contemporary understanding of the spread of disease and its consequences.

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