



Review: [Untitled]

Reviewed Work(s):

Frau fur fron: Die dreierallianz bei den Magar West-Nepals. by Michael Oppitz
N. J. Allen

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NEEDHAM, RODNEY. *Mamboru: history and structure in a domain of northwestern Sumba*. xxvi, 292 pp., illus., map, tables, bibliogr. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987. £25.00

This book demonstrates impressively how useful it can be to draw on analytical models when conducting fieldwork. Needham stayed in Mamboru, in the fifties, for barely two months but systematic questioning, and the nature of the topic he was studying (the local system of descent and affinal alliance), enabled him to compile an astonishing wealth of relevant information. Needham announced the present book in a 1980 article (in Fox J.J. (ed.) *The flow of life*, Harvard Univ. Press), in which he explained the various asymmetric-prescriptive and bilineal-nonprescriptive systems of Sumbanese societies as variations based on the same constant principles. However, only subsequent access to other, partly unpublished, sources gave the author the 'trust in my own findings that I could not have previously granted them', thus enabling him to complement the comparative and theoretical results of the earlier article with a detailed local analysis.

The monograph starts with a historical and ethnographical overview gleaned from the scanty literature which, as usual in the work of Needham, displays his erudite reading. The comprehensiveness of this overview—perhaps not always necessary for the theme of the book—is motivated by the wish 'that the people of Mamboru... shall have a kind of cultural handbook of their land'.

The bulk of the book consists of an analysis of the field data. Today's nine villages of the domain can be explained as descendants from one sole mother village which was founded about 400 years ago. From there the patrilineal clans spread over the territory. Originally there were from three to ten clans (according to different sources). Nowadays, through processes of fission and fusion, there are twenty-eight. The clans themselves are segmented into named 'houses' which make up the villages; the founding clan of each village determines the subordination of the village to the 'great house' of that clan in its village of origin. A spiritual bond links bundles of related clans to six 'priestly houses'. Some details are not quite clear in this respect but the emerging picture of both territorial and genealogical affiliations is reminiscent of patterns found elsewhere in Indonesia.

The clans as a whole are exogamous; particular alliances, however, are often dependent on branches or houses of clans. They represent asymmetrical relationships between superior wife-givers and inferior wife-takers. Across the descent groups runs a division into three ranks, as a rule endogamous or, eventually, with hypergamy (an unexplained exception appears on p. 124); in the latter case, the lower rank of the mother is inherited. The terminology displays the classical characteristics of asymmetric prescriptive alliance, with a clear indication—recognised by the participants themselves—of a formal closure linking the three necessary lines into a circle. Marriage with

MBD, if available, is held to be obligatory, FZD is forbidden, and there are strong rules of avoidance for BW. MZD, on the other hand, is allowed, albeit with certain restrictions. With the exception of some rare cases where no brideprice is paid and where the man moves in with his wife, marriage is patrilineal.

Marriage prestations are dealt with at length, corresponding to the importance attributed to them in the 1980 article for the asymmetric situation in Sumba as a whole. These prestations confirm the asymmetric alliances between the descent groups involved—clans or smaller segments operating individually. Needham provides examples of the latter possibility which show that a particular segment of a clan can act as wife-giver for the same descent group for which another segment acts as wife-taker. In the case of a 'wrong' marriage which reverses an established wife-giver/wife-taker relationship, the offence must ritually be absolved; the new, reversed direction of the alliance is regarded as confirmed if it is repeated in the two following generations. In practice, therefore, the system leaves much more room for manoeuvring than could be expected; such numerous illustrating examples help delineate the basic principles (duality, asymmetry, intransitivity) all the more clearly, and are a special virtue of this excellent monograph.

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OPPITZ, MICHAEL. *Frau für Fron: die Dreierallianz bei den Magar West-Nepals*. 110 pp., illus. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1988

An idealised genealogical diagram illustrating prescriptive matrilineal cross-cousin marriage must have at least three lines if every individual is shown as married. This minimal form of the elementary structure of kinship is realised in the (originally three-clan) village studied by Oppitz; the main title alludes to the exchange of women for bride service, the relationship which links the three units. As befits the author of a very substantial introduction to Lévi-Strauss, not to mention two other useful monographs on Nepal, the book has clear theoretical ambitions. Attractively written, extremely brief (20,000 words), published in a prestigious series at a low price, it may well be widely used by teachers of social anthropology in the German-speaking world.

A lightning history of studies of prescriptive alliance leads us to a primal MBD marriage between the earthy son of Parbati and her brother Indra's heavenly daughter. An origin legend tells of three clans, but the last two centuries have seen the growing population fragment into twenty separate three-unit exchange cycles. The structural elaboration is ascribed to four specified transformational processes. The inferior wife-takers and superior wife-givers have contrasting roles at life-cycle rituals, providing respectively services or consumables, and gifts which endure or increase. Joking and respect relationships correlate with marriageable and

unmarriageable, and the wife-taker/giver relationship can be linked with aspects of calendrical and shamanic rituals, and with the use of domestic space. Once a year the women pour ritual scorn on the whole system of marriage.

Apart from the 'parallel cross-cousins' on p. 77 and a reversed legend in fig. 13, the picture is neat. Too neat? A much longer monograph, soon to appear, may allay doubts. But, *inter alia*, since kinship terminologies are manipulated *post factum* to regularise *mésalliances*, can we really believe that 100 per cent. of intravillage marriages are with real or classificatory MBD? How closed are those twenty cycles? And how deep rooted is the triadic structure anyway? Do many informants connect it with the three notches on the shaman's drumstick, and is it lexicalised so that FFZD=MBW, or WBWB-ZH? How widespread is it among the Kham?

This sort of one-village structuralism does tend to de-emphasise the wider culture-historical context. Nothing systematic is said about the apparently massive Hinduisation. One notes that in a genetically Tibeto-Burman language three-quarters of the kinship terms come from Nepali, and that the primal marriage is a *kanyadan* involving Hindu deities. Several Lévi-Straussian themes leave one unconvinced. The relationship between bone:flesh and wife-taker:-giver remains unclear; and the notion that wife-givers see short cycles as less 'risky' than long is entirely speculative. Finally, the theory that derives asymmetrical prescription from symmetrical is dismissed far too easily. The derivation need not pass simply from a dyadic to a triadic structure. For one thing, many neighbouring peoples possess four-clan structures, or claim to have done so, and four clan names are sometimes listed for these Kham Magars; so perhaps the triadism derives from a quadripartition. This enjoyable little book raises big, but potentially soluble, problems.

N.J. ALLEN

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RAPHAEL, RAY. *The men from the boys: rites of passage in male America*. xviii, 228 pp. Lincoln, London: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1988. £15.95

This book is really pop psychology masquerading as anthropology, another contribution to the 'men-have-problems-too' literature that has been dribbling out in reaction to feminism. 'Initiations today function more as tests to determine who can make the grade than as educational tools that encourage the development of all young men', the jacket copy reads. Nothing inside is at a much higher level.

Raphael is a part-time teacher at the College of the Redwoods (discipline unspecified) and author of *Edges* (about contemporary rural America). For the present book, he interviewed a hundred American men about their comings of age. Naturally he did not find legitimate, society-wide rites of passage—which, he proposes, ensure adult identity formation in some primitive cultures. What facilitates social

maturation in primitive cultures without adolescent rituals he never figures out.

Raphael finds 'reasonable facsimiles' of male rites of passage in American boot camps and medical schools and fraternities, 'free variations' in do-it-yourself adventures and travels, and lots of glibly-expressed angst and guilt and ambivalence about manhood in the quoted 'voices' of his often long-winded subjects. So what else is new?

Raphael has not grasped the implications for his argument of the rich historiography on Western youth. Western males have had nothing like New Guinea or Australia-type rites of passage at any time in recorded history, yet they have come of age with reasonable assurance up to the gender dissolution of the last two decades.

Nor has he really grasped the cultural implications of what pervades the mentalities of his quoted subject: radical individualism. A culture privileging the autonomously constructed meanings of the self is not likely to encourage any collective rituals, adolescent or otherwise. Its only positively-valued rituals will be those of the individualistic self.

Raphael reports with amazement but no further interpretation, for instance, that 'where I anticipated shyness or reserve [among my subjects], an unwillingness to disclose personal lives, I found instead an almost obsessive desire to make the private public' (p. 70). But this is the culture. Self-disclosure is a perfect example of a contemporary conventionalised 'meaningful' American act—of a ritual, in other words. (It is how you get cured by your therapist; it defines the making of friendship.)

The only interest the book may hold for anthropologists is as a symptom rather than an analysis of the peculiar culture it purports to be about.

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RIDINGTON, ROBIN. *Trail to heaven: knowledge and narrative in a northern native community*. xv, 301 pp., illus., bibliogr. Iowa City: Univ. of Iowa Press, 1988. \$27.50

This book is not an ordinary ethnography. Rather, it describes life in an Indian community in northern British Columbia from the point of view of the author's own involvement with the community and its people. It is based on the premiss that 'An anthropologist's own experience is a proper, even essential, subject of inquiry'. Ridington believes that 'narrative ethnographic writing' is the most successful means of communicating the metaphors, philosophy and style of another culture to a Euro-American audience.

The author describes his initial contacts in 1959 with the Dunne-za, or Beaver, Indians who live in the vicinity of the Alaska Highway near Fort St John, and his awakening awareness of the Indians' relation to their land. After receiving formal training in anthropology, he returned to the Peace River country in 1964 to begin a study of cultural psychology. Having attempted with limited success to administer