

## Culture



**Mary Lee STEARNS, *Haida Culture in Custody—the Masset Band*, Vancouver, Douglas & McIntyre, 1981. 322 pages, US \$35.00 (cloth), US \$17.95 (paper)**

Bea Medecine

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stood in terms of its connections with specific points in the social structure; the points which they choose to explore are financial transactions occurring at marriage. They develop, in an essay which I found somewhat difficult to follow, the very significant gender symbolism correlates of societies in which the male gains his bride through bride-wealth versus those in which he gains her through bride service.

The third sociological essay, that of Llewelyn-Davis, focuses on the relationship between Maasai notions of gender and the property system. Females are owned at least in part by others (first father, then husband). Males are owned as children but not as adults. Initiation is the process by which males are transformed from dependent owned people to independent owners of people. In a fascinating conclusion, Llewelyn-Davis describes the contradiction between the women's dissatisfaction with their owned and ownerless status and their enjoyment and appreciation of the romantic male initiates. In appreciating the cultural ideal of initiation and the male initiates themselves, they are assenting in their own subordination as initiation is the institution which simultaneously separates males from females and establishes males as having superior rights. This essay describes female subordination as anchored in male initiation, a custom to which women enthusiastically subscribe and raises the issue of the extent to which women cross-culturally subscribe unwittingly to those very institutions which promulgate inegalitarian ideas.

Switching now to the culturalist section I found Strathern's article provided the newest perspective. Gender symbols, she suggests, are not just about gender and sex but refer beyond themselves to issues of rank and prestige in general. This essay thus raises the very interesting question of the symbolic range of reference of gender codes. Whitehead's essay on native North American homosexuality neatly compares the Amerindian model of homosexuality with the New Guinea and the contemporary Western models, describing and analyzing each in terms of the wider cultural system of which it is a part and using each model to shed light on the related set of gender concepts. Poole's article, characterized by his usual impressive ethnographic depth, successfully and insightfully explores the anomalous initiated old woman as a metaphor for all Bimin-Kuskusmin (New Guinea) gender concerns. Brandes' paper on male perceptions of the sexes and sexuality in an Andalusian town is noteworthy in the context of this volume for the vividness of its ethnographic description. Many of the essays lack precisely this

quality, which I count as a weakness of the book as a whole. Nevertheless, this volume is intended primarily as a theoretical rather than an ethnographic contribution and is highly provocative and successful as such.

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Mary Lee STEARNS, *Haida Culture in Custody—the Masset Band*, Vancouver, Douglas & McIntyre, 1981. 322 pages, US \$35.00 (cloth), US \$17.95 (paper).

*By Bea Medicine*  
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The rich cultures of the Northwest Coast have been presented in their dazzling and somewhat idealistic patterns in the "ethnographic present." This book is important—for it deals with contemporary life in a community which has been subjected to coerced culture change. Detailed and careful analyses of Haida means to maintain an identity and satisfactory life styles are presented in a dynamic fashion. This dynamism is charted through the economic, political, social structural, and ceremonial manifestations. Stearns presents a coherent interpretation of the strategies by which native peoples maintain an indigenous orientation in a modern world.

Presenting a strong ethno-historical grounding, the book moves to the political setting which presents an insightful treatment of the interface of governmental intrusive institutions and the Haida community. It reveals the implantation of the roots of dependency which permeates most native groups today. This is an arena of anthropological reporting which tends to be overlooked in the nexus of culture change. Stearns demonstrates processes by which underlying values can be directed toward passivity in administered human relationships. Certain adaptive measures undertaken by the Masset Band are explicated. Loss of land and resources are basic to this change. Ramifications of this process are explained. But the strength of this book lies in the explications of native re-organization of the structural elements of the native culture which allows a persistence. This is most clearly presented in the re-ordering of the basic unit of society—the family. Within this social structural data, Stearns utilizes demographic techniques which add new dimensions to the study of native

groups. This method is a decided asset and adds greater substance to the work.

Most importantly, this study places Masset in an interactional frame within the contexts of the larger Canadian society. This focus begins in the ethno-historical background and carries through to the present time. She deals with coercion, conflict, conciliation and the rise of a new Haida consciousness which transcends the original village. The emergence of enhanced ethnic pride and its concomitant expressions in art, ritual, and renewed vigor is a fascinating account.

Besides a chapter on the "Family System", the author devotes another chapter to "Mating and Marriage", in which she presents important information dealing with consensual unions, marital status, and birth status through time. Within this context, she deals with notions of propriety and laxness which are seldom examined in current community configurations. Within the chapter on "The Domestic Economy", she treats reciprocal gift exchange and demonstrates its function. Thus the matrilineal model continues to govern ceremonial relations and interactions within Masset. A careful examination of ceremonial events—as weddings, and other life cycle events, the dynamics of exchange are clarified. This study testifies to the durability of native culture which by the redefinition of social relations maintains continuity and sets ethnic boundaries.

One cannot expect everything to be equally treated in culture change treatises. However, slightly more information on child training practises which form the nexus of cultural continuity might have added a new dimension. More importantly, Stearns spells out her field techniques. She speaks of incorporation into the native village, her field methodology, and the resultant reciprocity on her part. This is an aspect of anthropological reporting which is seldom given, and in itself, is a valuable addition.

In all, this book which is easily read could be used effectively in Anthropology, as well as Native Studies Departments. The true test of the book would be Haida appraisals of it. There are certain to be such appreciations forthcoming in the future.

Joe SAWCHUK, *The Metis of Manitoba*, Toronto, Peter Martin Assoc., 1978. 96 pages, US \$4.95 (paper).

By *Krystyna Sieciechowicz*  
*University of Toronto*

The *Metis of Manitoba* is a short readable book which appraises the substantive elements of the concept of Metis ethnicity. The discussion of ethnicity is filtered through the author's particular familiarity with the Manitoba Metis Federation (M.M.F.). In the first part of the book Sawchuk reviews the problems inherent in the concept of ethnicity. He critiques a number of approaches as being incomplete, suggests an alternative and in the process notes the discriminatory aspects of the treatment received by the Metis in fur-trade history. In the latter part of the book, Sawchuk expands upon his definition of ethnicity with specific reference to the M.M.F.

The definition of Metis is an historically convoluted one fraught with problems and confusion. Sawchuk notes that the term is "far from being some static and predictable unit", but is in fact "in a state of constant flux" (p. 13). Given this flexibility in membership, locale and even existence as a group, many of the accepted definitions of ethnicity are shown not to incorporate the special, though by no means unique, features of Metis ethnicity. Sawchuk correctly critiques the subjectivist and objectivist approaches to ethnicity, which "see ethnicity as strictly a cultural phenomenon" (p. 10). One cannot, he insists, "isolate and identify the contemporary Metis using any of the 'cultural markers'" (p. 10). If anything "the most that can be said is that they share a common historical background" (p. 10). In many ways this common history functions not unlike a mythical apical ancestor. It forms an understandably important focus for all those who are and all those who would like to be related to the participants of the two Metis Rebellions of the last century.

Having discarded the cultural approach to ethnicity Sawchuk suggests that it is more productive "to concentrate instead on social processes which delineate ethnic groups" (p. 11). The change in emphasis is from individuals and their self-description to organizational strategies which may or may not be collective. Accordingly, the M.M.F. employed political and economic strategies in order to obtain economic aid from the Federal Government. The Metis thus represent "an example of the ethnic group as interest group" (p. 11), and are