

Culture



Peter H. STEPHENSON, *The Hutterian People: Ritual and Rebirth in the Evolution of Communal Life*, Lanham, MD.: University Press of America, 1991, 272 pages, \$43.75 (hardcover)

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and aimed at a reconstruction of Nuxalk culture as it was in early contact times. His collaborators probably had less to say about older forms of material culture and economic behaviour than many other domains of culture. In addition, in his earlier work in the Bella Coola region, Harlan I. Smith had focused on material culture, at least partially absolving McIlwraith of the responsibility for including it in his researches. (Much of Smith's Nuxalk data remains unpublished. Someone should bring out an edition of this material to complement McIlwraith.)

What is present in *The Bella Coola Indians*, makes talk of deficiencies seem like carping. The book is especially strong on religious and ceremonial life. The *Kusiut* society, for example, is well and richly described in the course of a chapter of 266 pages. McIlwraith took full advantage of the fact that he not only observed but participated in the 1923-24 winter dance performances of the *Kusiut* society, which, by the time of his fieldwork, had become the principal Nuxalk secret society.

The whole project of memory ethnography has often been questioned, but, although this book shows some of the weaknesses of that approach (aside from the missing topics, it is sometimes difficult to know to what extent observed practices overly colour the reconstruction of "traditional" practices [i.e., in describing *Kusiut* performances]), McIlwraith's work shows the quality of ethnography that can be achieved when a talented investigator works with able and interested local collaborators.

The book is not tightly organized or argued, but expansive and generous. A truly outstanding and detailed index (40 pages!) makes it easy to find things. This last point is not trivial, for, as Baker points out in his introduction, this is not so much a work to read through as a reference source on Nuxalk culture. I have been using it as such over many years of comparative research on the Northwest Coast. Whenever I turn to it I learn something new, usually well expressed. I am glad that this reprint will create the possibility of many more readers and seekers into this magnificent work. Once again, my congratulations to editor and publisher.

Peter H. STEPHENSON, *The Hutterian People: Ritual and Rebirth in the Evolution of Communal Life*, Lanham, MD.: University Press of America, 1991, 272 pages, \$43.75 (hardcover).

By Joan C. Stevenson

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The literature on Hutterites is extensive, and Stephenson's unique contribution is his focus on belief and ritual, particularly all the rituals and daily reminders associated with the concept of new life, *metanoia*. The Hutterites' ascetic, communal lifestyle is a stark contrast to the societies of which they have been a part. Stephenson believes that Hutterian ritual is largely responsible for the persistence of their adaptation and provides critical support for their retention of members and in the maintenance of their system. Most of the book is an "analysis of Hutterian ideology via its primary symbols" (p. 5), but he also attempts to understand their rituals in terms of a larger theoretical framework, specifically systems theory and cybernetics. He draws from the work of Rappaport, e.g. *Pigs for the Ancestors: Ritual in the Ecology of a New Guinea People* (Yale University Press, 1968).

The first three chapters are a succinct review of their early history. Chapter 1 reviews the birth of the *Taufer* (baptizer) movement and shows how the adult baptism ritual was central to Hutterian beliefs and that the extreme persecution which it elicited often led to a final "baptism of blood" and martyrdom. Chapter 2 describes their migrations in Europe and the origins of their communal lifestyle. Chapter 3 summarizes the most significant symbols: the tripartite baptism concept, its isomorphism with the holy trinity and the biology of birth, and finally, the practice of a communal lifestyle as a rebirth of Christ's body."

The next two chapters describe contemporary life in North America. Social organization and kinship are discussed briefly followed by a relatively long but weak chapter on growth and colony fission. He lists some of the social supports for their unusually high fertility but neglects to mention an important one, their short breastfeeding times and early supplementation. He argues that the evidence for the size of the fertility decline in the Hutterites is exaggerated if not wrong, because demographers

have not controlled for the position of individual colonies in the growth and fission cycle. The later in the cycle, the closer to creation of a new colony, the harder it is for young men to get positions of responsibility and thus, marriages tend to be postponed. This is probably part of the demographic picture but hardly explains the increasing evidence for a several decade old population decline, or some of the related changes elaborated on by Peter, e.g. *The Dynamics of Hutterite Society* (University of Alberta Press, 1987). Stephenson might have considered dividing this chapter into two parts and better organizing and synthesizing the current demographic data. He also could have more explicitly examined a possible relationship between ideology and relative success in creating new colonies.

Stephenson's emphasis on homeostatic mechanisms colors his view. He refers to evolutionary theory as a "deterministic philosophy" (p.201) which illustrates how little of his theoretical discussions reflect the influence of literature after the mid-1970s. Evolutionary theory has long since incorporated decision-making models, e.g. Boyd and Richardson's *Culture and the Evolutionary Process* (University of Chicago Press, 1985).

Chapters 6 and 7 take us deeply inside the Hutterite's vision of their world (ethos). He shows how even the most mundane routines, spatial arrangements (proxemics), and the presence or absence of symbols reinforce their beliefs in the holy trinity, separation from "the world," and the importance of rebirth. The Holy Spirit and the forces of evil as exemplified by the Evil Eye are tangible and real.

Finally, Stephenson tries to determine how many of the adjustments made within this very adaptive, self-simplifying system (p. 204) are "cognized" action (p.219). He discusses the complexity of the interplay between their rituals and need for the colony to fission which is initially recognized when there are not enough jobs for all the adult males (and indirectly delays baptism and marriage). His description of their symbol system (eidos) is a convincing one and is a good addition to your Hutterite library. The absence of theoretical references after the 1970s may preclude its use in the classroom.

María CÁTEDRA, *This World, Other Worlds: Sickness, Suicide, Death, and the Afterlife among the Vaqueiros de Alzada of Spain*, translated by William Christian, Jr., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992, 389 pages.

By Stacy Leigh Pigg

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"One learns how to die just as one learns how to live" (p. 351), Spanish anthropologist María Cátedra tells us. Her ethnographic portrait of the Vaqueiros de Alzada, people who herd cattle in the Asturian Mountains of Spain, shows how death is a cultural process embedded in a particular way of living. The high suicide rate among the Vaqueiros prompts her to probe deeply into the Vaqueiros sense of "when it is worth the trouble to live and when it is worth the trouble to die" (p.355). The result is a sensitive and insightful study of the relations between cosmology and ecology, household organization and life trajectories, body and soul.

Criticizing "monographs [that] begin with a corpse" (p.4) and in which "the main protagonists, those who die, are barely mentioned" (p.348), Cátedra instead treats death as "a continuum whose center is the physical death itself" (p.5). In doing so, she emphasizes not mortuary rituals but the people who contemplate their own deaths, care for the dying, and mourn those lost to sickness, accidents, or suicide. It is in this conceptualization of the ethnographic study of death that the originality of this work lies. Like other recent ethnographies that make advances by envisioning new domains for analysis or re-drawing the boundaries of the old ones, this book shows it is possible to uncover the cultural dimension of experiences — such as the experience of death and the choice to commit suicide — normally treated as natural, or private, and unknowable.

The book traces the continuum of death in Vaqueiro life by examining sickness, death, and the afterlife. In each of these lengthy sections, the presentation of the ways illnesses, deaths, and spirits (respectively) are classified opens up into a more subtle discussion of what can only be called the Vaqueiro way of life — the hard work of raising cattle in a marginal environment and the interdependencies within and between households in these isolated communities. Three sets of relations —