

Culture



Victoria S. LOCKWOOD, *Tahitian Transformation. Gender and Capitalist Development in a Rural Society*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993, 179 pages, maps, photographs, figure, tables

Anna Paini

Volume 15, Number 1, 1995

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1083736ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1083736ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Canadian Anthropology Society / Société Canadienne d'Anthropologie (CASCA), formerly/anciennement Canadian Ethnology Society / Société Canadienne d'Ethnologie

ISSN

0229-009X (print)

2563-710X (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Paini, A. (1995). Review of [Victoria S. LOCKWOOD, *Tahitian Transformation. Gender and Capitalist Development in a Rural Society*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993, 179 pages, maps, photographs, figure, tables]. *Culture*, 15(1), 102–104. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1083736ar>

Tous droits réservés © Canadian Anthropology Society / Société Canadienne d'Anthropologie (CASCA), formerly/anciennement Canadian Ethnology Society / Société Canadienne d'Ethnologie, 1995

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

Érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

ture was spirited by a female collective for purely economic motives. Men's reasons for complying and forming a somewhat uneasy alliance were sexual, not biological (Knight 1992: 124). Memes, then, are employed in a holistic manner to account for the possibility of this revolutionary event by serving as a late in the game substitution for genes.

The model thus forwarded is not a self-sustaining one, nor is it the most parsimonious. The logic of the "sex strike," as Knight has coined it, is understood more profitably from a Darwinian perspective. It is Knight, after all, who concedes that the corpus of sociobiology of the 1980s did much in the way of casting a more realistic, not to mention politically palatable, role for females within the evolutionary context. Females were – and still are – active agents, selectively discriminative in search of their own genetic goals (Knight, 1992: 8). Equally plausible then is the ubiquity of genetic interests within the calculus of both female and male, if you will, agency.

The principal analytic shortcoming of *Blood Relations* is the tacit acceptance of the gross dichotomy between biology and culture. While Dawkins (1976), Lumsden and Wilson (1981), and Barkow (1988) assert that genes and culture are intermixed inexorably, they maintain that they coeval nevertheless. Knight, much worse, espouses the hierarchical ordering of the two concepts *à la* Descartes (Dunphy, 1990), perhaps known best for his formulation of the mind-body split.

What is needed sorely is a new paradigm for the understanding of human behaviour which entails, in addition to integrating the various candidates for behavioural explanation (genetics, culture, environment, mind structure), explicating the manner in which all of the above are a unitary whole. To be sure, each of these competing sub-units are the offspring of the scientific method which has endeavoured to understand some large unit – in this case, human behaviour – by breaking it down into smaller, increasingly discernable units which are susceptible to further collapse. The ultimate exercise, then, is reconstruction rather than integration; the latter implies, incorrectly, mutual exclusivity and valid empirical differentiation.

Blood Relations is both a challenging and compelling argument. Its principal contribution is the much needed consideration of female agency within the human evolutionary context. Knight succeeds in this regard by drawing upon the

lessons of sociobiology and focusing explicitly on the most striking primate curiosity – the absence of oestrus amongst anatomically modern human females. More than a parochial thesis addressed to the human evolutionary specialist, *Blood Relations* is a challenge to the entire discipline of anthropology. In elaborating upon the increasing recognition that "facts" are fluid rather than fixed, Knight exposes the political agendas imbedded within extant anthropological models, concomitantly disclosing his own. Indeed, Knight's ancillary invitation into the sociology of knowledge ought to be accepted. However, for the reasons suggested above, its duration as an acceptable social scientific "myth" will be, in all likelihood, a short one.

References

- BARKOW, J.
1988 *Darwin, Sex and Status: Biological Approaches to Mind and Culture*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- DAWKINS, R.
1976 *The Selfish Gene*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- DUNPHY, W.
1990 *History of Western Philosophy*, New York: Collier Books.
- LUMSDEN, C. J. and E.O. WILSON
1981 *Genes, Mind, and Culture: the coevolutionary process*, Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press.

Victoria S. LOCKWOOD, *Tahitian Transformation. Gender and Capitalist Development in a Rural Society*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993, 179 pages, maps, photographs, figure, tables.

By Anna Painsi

Dipartimento di scienze antropologiche, Torino, Italy

Victoria Lockwood's concern in *Tahitian Transformation. Gender and Capitalist Development in a Rural Society* is the exploration of the diverse ways in which the market world system has impinged on a small scale rural economy. Lockwood argues that the wide range of variability in responses at the local level has been neglected by those captured by the world system macro-

model *à la* Wallerstein. On the other hand, anthropologists are often locked into their localisms. The author avoids both drifts by considering the two levels: the global context and the local one. Thus she devotes the first part of the book to the macrolevel context (regional, French, colonial, and the world system) and the second part to rural Tahitian communities' transformations, concentrating on the island of Tubai. Based on her field research in Tubai, which spanned from 1980 to 1991, she provides a close reading of Tubaian men's and women's responses to the market economy, focusing on the modification of gender relations.

Beginning with an overview of the social structure in Maohi society, an encompassing term the author uses to refer to the ancestors of present day islanders of the five groups which comprise French Polynesia (p. 19), Lockwood sets into context the interference of Europeans in Tahiti in the last part of the 18th century. The arrival of the London Missionary Society speeded up social transformations. Lockwood agrees with those who stress that the chiefly political system was not dismantled by the new Christian religious system; rather it was reinforced by Christian religious ideology.

Two important changes in the social scene were instead the result of the French indigenous policy of direct rule: the dismantling of the indigenous political hierarchy (p. 27) through a system of government-appointed chiefs and the codification of the traditional land tenure system. However, the colonialist effort at individualization of land titles was doomed to fail.

From the engagement of Tahitians with foreigners, the author moves to analyze the changes in Tahitian women's lives as these interactions became more steady. Lockwood's analysis of the domestication of women and the resulting separation of public and domestic spheres as a result of missionary teaching (pp. 40-41) is quite interesting. Missionaries were responsible for imposing a Western patriarchal pattern of male authority, on the one hand, and for imposing a new way of gender relations, on the other. They suppressed cultural practices such as infanticide and abortion and stressed values based on the nuclear family, thus isolating women who could not rely anymore on each other for domestic chores.

In Chapter 4, which concludes Part 1, Lockwood explores the concept of "welfare state colonialism." She provides a skilled account of France's contemporary policies in generating an artificial economy which raised the standard of living of Tahitians but at the same time augmented dependency on the state through several mechanisms: subsidized projects, government employment, elderly and retirement pensions, and child welfare payments.

Parallels with the contemporary situation of New Caledonia are striking. Having conducted field research on the island of Lifu, which in 1989 became the administrative center for the newly constituted Loyalty Province, I found it quite revealing to follow the experience of Tubai, designated as the administrative center of the Austral Island Subdivision in the 1980s. For example, the elephantine expansion of the public sector such that the "government salaries are by far the major source of income on the island" (p. 59) is one point of comparison.

In Part 2, the author introduces us to contemporary Tubai: its modernization and its socioeconomic organization, followed by a chapter on the Tubai Potato project. Here she makes the most of the aim, stated in the Introduction, of "dissecting individual cases in their historically particularistic way" (p. 2). In spite of market linkages, the peasant mode of production has demonstrated to be a viable form of production in Tubai, compatible with familial land ownership. Lockwood explores the different kinds of strategies and involvement in the project by households, by single women and by young people and links it with perceptions of risks and rising consumption standards. She concludes stressing that higher participation in capitalist markets by Tubai islanders does not necessarily demand an involvement in capitalist relations of production.

The author claims that the breaking down of familial land ownership into private property would mean not only concentration in the hands of a few, but also in the hands of men who would become the only landowners. Today many islander women have increased their financial autonomy through potato cultivation. In fact, earnings from this crop represent a major cash-earning activity for many women.

Although Lockwood devotes a few pages in Chapter 6 to profiles of Tubai households, one of

the biggest deficiencies of this ethnography remains the lack of indigenous voices. This text, written in a clear style, raises many compelling issues. However, some questions are only tacked on and the risk to simplify complex issues such as "westernization," which Lockwood considers "synonymous with 'modernization'" (p. 46), is there. Nevertheless, it is a text to be recommended in introductory courses in "development studies" and "women's studies."

Henry T. LEWIS. *Ilocano Irrigation: The Corporate Resolution*. Honolulu: Asian Studies at Hawaii, No. 37, University of Hawaii Press, 1991, 158 pages, (paper).

By Brian Fegan

Agrarian Studies, Yale University

This is a welcome book for students of social organization in societies with bilateral kinship, for those interested in debates about the organization of self-help irrigators' groups and their relation to state irrigation systems in peasant societies and for human geographers and anthropologists of Southeast Asia and especially the Philippines. Its theme is that in a society with bilateral kinship and therefore overlapping personal kindreds, the nuclear family can act as a corporate group, and that above this level, groups based on control of property (for example, villages and irrigators' groups) may be corporate, depending on ecological, demographic and economic factors. Its strength lies in the detailed account of the various layers of rights in water and land held by landowners, tenants, the irrigators' group, group officials, members holding land from the group, and farmers who buy its surplus water.

Professor Lewis made a comparative study of wet-rice farmers in two villages of related culture in the Northern Philippines. Based on fieldwork in the 1960s and 1970s, the book builds on Lewis' *Ilocano Rice Farmers* (University of Hawaii Press, 1971). His argument that the family and irrigation association are "corporate" follows the ideas of George Appell in *The Societies of Borneo* (Special Publication of the American Anthropological Association, 1976). Lewis holds that the proper criteria for whether a group is corporate are "essentially the control of property" (p. 16) and "whether it has the power as a social entity to enter into jural

relations" (p. 16, citing Appell 1976, p. 70). He rejects as a criterion whether the group is perpetual.

In both of the villages described, households range in wealth from poor landless families through those holding a barely adequate set of plots that they own and work, rent in or rent out, to a few that have enough land to derive most of their income from rents. Many work for other villagers or at non-farm work; some, notably in Ilocos Norte, receive remittances. Corporateness is not an either/or state:

[...] the relatively wealthier, higher status families are more corporate [...] in that they are [...] more involved in the management and maintenance of family resources (p. 33).

Buyon in Ilocos Norte is densely settled and old. The nuclear or stem family household acts as a corporate group holding farm, house and water rights; however farms are so small that families operate them in virtual isolation from each other. The state-imposed village has few functions and little to hold it together. However a Buyon household belongs and has obligations to each of the tightly corporate irrigation societies that delivers water to its scattered plots. Mambabanga in Isabela Province of the Cagayan Valley, was pioneered around three generations ago by migrants from Ilocos Norte. It is less densely settled and farms are bigger. The household is a weaker corporate group as members seek land and income outside it, while its members engage in exchange labour with its several field neighbours. Here the village has a smaller population, sewn together by dense mesh of exchanges and is quasi-corporate; corporate irrigators' groups are rare in this area.

The book focuses on the *zanjeras*, technically sophisticated communal irrigation systems. Membership is based on collective ownership of water resources and is separate both politically and socially from the organization of state-imposed villages, based on residence.

Lewis' thesis is that Ilocano *zanjera* irrigation societies are corporate groups that farmers developed for the solution of a common goal or problem. *Zanjeras* are corporate in that they control the use and inheritance of property, meet more or less regularly and have representative leadership. The written charters of some show they have endured for over 200 years. Crucially, the *zanjera* is what