

## Culture



**Sherry B. ORTNER and Harriet WHITEHEAD, *Sexual Meanings: The Cultural Construction of Gender and Sexuality*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1981. 435 pages, US \$10.95 (paper), US \$34.50 (cloth)**

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côté, il semble souscrire à la tradition structuraliste: derrière toutes les pratiques culturelles se profile un même schème conceptuel plus ou moins net selon les cas, mais ne dérivant d'aucune de ces pratiques. D'un autre côté, il fait constamment appel au schéma marxiste: certains aspects de la culture (subsistance, propriété, échange économique) précèdent les autres (langue, mythes, rituels) qui servent à les légitimer. Cette valse-hésitation sur le discours anthropologique à adopter se poursuit tout au long du livre. Est-ce parce que Godelier a voulu écrire un livre plus accessible au grand public (de grâce, épargnez-nous la philosophie)? Peut-être, mais pas complètement.

Quiconque s'intéresse à la Mélanésie et à l'anthropologie politique goûtera particulièrement les chapitres sur les Grands Hommes. Les hommes les plus importants de la société baruya sont les initiateurs, les Grands guerriers, les chamanes, les chasseurs de casoars et les fabricants de sel. Le premier statut est héréditaire, les autres échoient à des hommes aux qualités exceptionnelles. Le *big-man* des autres sociétés des hautes montagnes (Melpa, Enga et Mendi par exemple) est inconnu chez les Baruya. Dans un chapitre consacré à l'étude comparative des *big-men* des hautes montagnes, Godelier explique en quoi les Baruya sont différents. Ailleurs, les femmes sont échangées contre des biens; chez les Baruya, le mariage est un échange de sœurs; ailleurs, le chemin qui conduit à l'âge d'homme est marqué par la production, la circulation et l'accumulation de richesses; chez les Baruya, il l'est par l'initiation et la guerre; ailleurs, la société est conçue pour permettre à l'intérêt personnel et à la non-équivalence dans les échanges de se développer; chez les Baruya, l'équivalence se fait sentir partout. Ces comparaisons générales ne nous aident pas nécessairement à mieux comprendre cette société mais elles permettront de faire le point et inviteront à une réflexion fructueuse.

En définitive, nous tenons là un premier livre très intéressant sur les Baruya. Godelier laisse entendre que d'autres suivront. C'est pourquoi il serait injuste de critiquer l'ouvrage pour ses omissions ou le traitement quelque peu expéditif qu'il réserve à certains sujets. On pourra le donner à lire aux étudiants et le recommander à des collègues en sachant que, les uns comme les autres, le liront avec plaisir et intérêt. Une douzaine de pages de photographies des Baruya en costume traditionnel contrastent agréablement avec un chapitre, à la fin du livre, sur l'expérience coloniale. *La production des Grands Hommes* devrait être traduit en anglais et doté de l'index qui lui fait défaut dans sa version originale.

Sherry B. ORTNER and Harriet WHITEHEAD, *Sexual Meanings: The Cultural Construction of Gender and Sexuality*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1981. 435 pages, US \$10.95 (paper), US \$34.50 (cloth).

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This book is a welcome and stimulating sequel to Rosaldo and Lamphere's *Women, Culture and Society*, providing detailed and provocative analyses of systems of symbols by which gender is represented in a variety of cultures. The volume is divided into two parts: an initial "culturalist" section emphasizing analyses of the internal logic of systems of gender symbols, and a shorter "sociological" section in which the emphasis is on the relationship between the symbols and social reality. The articles which I found most stimulating fell in the latter section and I will therefore give them the most emphasis here.

The sociological contributors, Ortner, Collier and Rosaldo, and Llewelyn-Davis avoid vague generalities about the relationships between symbol and social structure and adhere to specific demonstrable connections, for which they should be congratulated. Both Ortner, and Collier and Rosaldo, relate the symbolism of gender to the social organization of marriage, claiming in two highly provocative essays that the former is derived at least in part from the latter. Analyzing Polynesian materials, Ortner explores the difference for the construction of gender between patrilineal exogamous societies in which dowry is given and cognatic endogamous societies in which the woman inherits land. She demonstrates that the organizational features of the former vitiate the female's relatively high status as daughter and sister in her natal group and concentrate structural attention on her relatively low status as wife in her husband's group. In the cognatic/endogamous/land inheritance systems, on the other hand, the role of wife is weakened and the roles of sister and daughter remain strong. Ortner demonstrates that the symbolism of gender in these two types of Polynesian society derives at least in part from which female kinship status is emphasized. Clearly this is a model for the analysis of the connection between gender symbolism and social organization which can be used in many societies and will stimulate many further studies.

Collier and Rosaldo's study argues like Ortner's that the symbolization of females should be under-

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).

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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