



The Semsa and Their Habitat.

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Hilbert's own foreword gives information about the narrators. 'Haboo' is what a Lushootseed audience calls out to show appreciation and to encourage a narrator. As Hess, says, it is an apt title.

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COUNTS, DOROTHY AYERS & DAVID R. COUNTS.

Ageing and its transformations: moving towards death in Pacific societies (ASAO Monogr. 10). xii, 336 pp., map, tables, bibliogr. Lanham: Univ. Press of America, 1985. \$28.00 (cloth), \$14.75 (paper)

Ageing is a topic that is attracting increasing attention among anthropologists, and the editors have to be congratulated for producing a volume that brings together a diverse set of ten ethnographic sketches into a coherent framework. The result is a collection of extremely readable essays that cross-refer to one another and to the wider literature on the topic.

In their introduction, the editors identify some of the ideas on ageing that have been toyed with during the brief history of gerontology in America, testing them against the subsequent chapters. The result is nearly always negative: cross-cultural studies have a habit of cutting down universalistic propositions to the particularities out of which they were first conceived. Neither the theory of disengagement, which postulates mutual withdrawal by the elderly and society in anticipation of death, nor the theory of gender switching in old age is born out from these studies in quite the stark terms in which they were conceived. Generally in Oceania, gender roles and the phenomenon of withdrawal in old age interact with one another; and always, it is the ability of individuals to participate in community life and negotiate their position that determines how they will experience old age. In those examples where there are marked differences of status between genders, women often have authority in the domestic domain initially and maintain and even expand this as they progress beyond child-bearing, whereas men in their prime dominate the public domain, and then when they are replaced by younger men, they begin to withdraw (e.g. Maori), though they may still retain prestige (e.g. Marshall Islands). But where there is no marked gender difference during the prime years, there appears to be little change in old age (e.g. Kaliai and Sudest Island). In Marquesas, it is the young who withdraw support while the elderly seek to display their independence.

The transition towards death is a more pronounced theme in the later chapters, and these tend to be caught up with cultural constructions and not with the wider issues. To this extent, the scale of diversity is a distraction and these

chapters will probably appeal primarily to those with a specialist knowledge in the region. Yet in one respect, these chapters are fully in tune with the implicit theme throughout the work. Having disposed of the universality of some common misconceptions on ageing, one is left with cultural interpretations of the process of ageing in individual cultures and this leads quite logically towards death among the privileged few who see out their natural life-span.

It is this interpretive aspect that is considered in the concluding assessment of the work by Victor Marshall, as an expert on ageing rather than the region. If anthropologists are frustrated with having their gifts to gerontology rejected, he asks, then what more might they take in the first place? This leads on to a résumé of the state of the art that goes well beyond the scope of this volume, though there are some links. And yet perhaps because he was not searching for it, he wholly overlooks the variation of the transition to old age with gender. This at least is a gift that the contributors have tried to make, and it has not been taken.

PAUL SPENCER

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DANDA, DIPALI G. & SANCHITA GHATAK. *The Semsá and their habitat*. vii, 81 pp., illus., map, tables, bibliogr. Calcutta: Anthropological Survey of India, 1985. £11

The tribal peoples living along the north-eastern borders of India, the Nagas, Kachins, Purums and others, once provided one of the finest 'anthropological laboratories' in the world. Since Indian independence it has been practically impossible for western anthropologists to work in these areas and thus a strange blank has emerged in the ethnographic map. We are thus particularly grateful when any publication allows us a glimpse into these hidden worlds, as in Milada Ganguli's finely illustrated *Pilgrimage to the Nagas* (Delhi, 1984) and now in this short work on the Semsá.

The authors, one an anthropologist and the other a cartographer, spent two months in the village of Semkhor in north Cachar, Assam. The whole village consists of the 'Semsá', a group of some 692 people with a separate identity, though loosely linked to the wider Dimasa group. Unlike all other groups in the area, population pressure on their swidden cultivated hills has not led to village fissioning and the founding of new settlements within recorded history. Instead, the Semsá are starting to intensify and use wet-rice cultivation. This self-imposed involution, again refuting the Boserupian hypothesis that people prefer leisure to other goods, is linked to a second oddity.

A man traces descent simultaneously through

his father's father and mother's mother, and thus belongs to both an agnatic and uterine lineage. A woman likewise belongs to two groups. This double descent system leads to the reported presence of five 'patriclans' and seventeen 'matriclans'. A man's first allegiance is to the 'patriclan', a woman's to the 'matriclan'. Men and women must marry outside both their agnatic and uterine lineages. Furthermore, there is strict village endogamy; only one case is remembered of a person marrying outside this small population. Finally, all must marry, and apparently all do so. A number of tables and diagrams give a preliminary indication of how this system is believed to work. It would be good to have a lengthier analysis of this intriguing, encapsulated, system, the 'mystery village' which greatly puzzled J. P. Mills and J. H. Hutton.

ALAN MACFARLANE

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DELAPORTE, YVES & MARIE M. ROUÉ. *Une communauté d'éleveurs de rennes: vie sociale des Lapons de Kautokeino* (Muséum National d'histoire Naturelle, Mem. Inst. Ethnol. 24. 200 pp., illus., plates, maps, tables, bibliogr. Paris: Institut d'Ethnologie, 1986. F. 192.60

The community of Kautokeino, located in the north Norwegian province of Finnmark, is one of the few remaining strongholds of Sami (Lapp) pastoralism, and of the rather distinctive way of life it entails. Though superficially familiar to all of us through the many popular accounts, this way of life has not been well documented anthropologically, and we are still without a comprehensive ethnography. The work of Paine, and more recently of Anderson, remains unpublished but for a few articles; for an alternative we have to turn to the more copious literature on the Sami of northern Sweden. It was in order to remedy this deficiency, albeit as a temporary stopgap, that the present study has been published.

There are four major chapters. The first, on the family, deals with child-rearing and sexual mores, and contains a long, rather dry analysis of systems of naming, kinship and marriage. The second discusses a crucial Sami institution, the *sii'da* (commonly translated as 'band'), in connexion with the organisation of work, residential composition, leadership, decision-making, and links to territory. In the third, the authors turn to relations beyond the *sii'da*, notably those involving theft and trade in reindeer. Finally, they examine the dynamics of reindeer herding itself, presenting a picture of the seasonal round through the words of one of their informants. Only a brief, concluding chapter deals with the last three centuries of history and change.

By modern anthropological standards, this book leaves much to be desired. Part of the problem evidently lies in the original fieldwork. Though covering ten months in all, the authors were never in the field for more than three months at a stretch, mostly during the summer, and never during the winter. As a result, their work lacks the insight and subtlety that we have come to expect from ethnographies informed by the experience of prolonged participant observation. It consists very largely of a *mêlée* of informants' statements, treated more or less anecdotally, to be taken at face value as exemplifications of this or that customary practice. To fill out their account, the authors rely quite heavily on secondary sources, notably the writings of Steen, who was pastor to the Kautokeino Sami some thirty years ago. This method of presentation blunts our sense of time: as the text jumps back and forth between then and now, the reader is left suspended in a void where nothing apparently changes. Yet in reality, everything has changed; indeed this book—which has lain on the shelf as an unpublished thesis for the last thirteen years—describes a way of life that already belongs to the past. Since to bring the account up to the present would have required more fieldwork as well as complete rewriting, the authors have thought fit to publish the work in its original condition, as a basis for future inquiry. In consequence, it is seriously out of date as regards developments both in Sami culture and society, and in the discipline of anthropology itself (with one small exception, there are no references in the bibliography to works published since 1972). As for that comprehensive and truly authoritative ethnography of the Norwegian Sami, we are still waiting.

TIM INGOLD

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FARDON, RICHARD (ed.). *Power and knowledge: anthropological and sociological approaches*. xii, 216 pp., bibliogr. Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1986. £12.50

In the new politicised anthropology of recent years, for which power is everywhere and everything carries differential symbolic status, Pierre Bourdieu's concepts are plainly put to work. But the other obvious influence, Michel Foucault's work which virtually provides the title of this book, is far more difficult to assess. Can anything in Foucault's writings be used for ethnographic description and anthropological analysis?

At first sight the answer seems obvious enough. Surely such concepts forged by him as 'statement', 'discursive formation', 'strategy' and 'knowledge/power' are useful and applicable to any history or any social or cultural