

So Many Concerns

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of the residents had been associated in Port-of-Spain with Rastafari (whose resonances as well as differences with Mother Earth's teachings Littlewood explores), and throughout the life of the community radical eschatology took very much of a back seat to the experience of living together on the land, sleeping on the bare earth, and so on. There was little awe attached to Mother Earth as incarnate Nature; indeed, says Littlewood, "On many occasions I wondered if the group should be seen less as a 'religious' community than as some high-spirited summer camp" (p. 201).

In his insightful study of colonial madness in Barbados, Lawrence Fisher claimed that it is "only in literature" that Caribbean madmen "clearly comprehend the nature of their society" (1985:247). Littlewood's multifaceted portrait of Mother Earth, along with Wilson's sketch of Oscar, may finally lay that assertion to rest. The dozens of memorable "madmen" of Caribbean fiction are not just literary tropes; in many cases, they see through what Memmi (1965:82) called the "colonialist hoax" as no "sane" person can afford to. "They" are amongst us in every village and at every crossroads; many of them have things to say that others dare not utter; and we may thank Littlewood for helping us to understand why, if we are to understand Caribbean societies, we should pay attention.

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Balinese Worlds. By Fredrik Barth. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993. 370 pp. £43.95/\$63.25 cloth, £15.95/\$22.95 paper

Balinese Worlds is a remarkable book. Not only is it an interesting contribution to the growing literature on Bali, but its methodological and theoretical argument is of great importance for anthropology in general. In terms of Baliology, the book is a challenging one. Whereas most anthropologists went to South Bali, Barth decided to conduct his research in the north, still by and large *terra incognita*; whereas most research has been focused on a particular locality, Barth adopted a comparative approach; moreover, Barth's study can be regarded as the first general ethnography of Bali since the days of Dutch colonial scholarship. In terms of anthropology, Barth launches a new model for the study of complex societies in which variation and the ways in which variation is generated are the central issues. He demonstrates how Balinese individuals in particular social settings use various traditions of knowledge to give shape to their actions and shows that their interpretations of the world in which they live are always in a state of flux. He develops this argument step by step throughout the book, always keeping in mind its methodological implications.

North Bali provides an ideal environment for such a study because it is virtually made up of local variations. In parts 1 and 2 Barth highlights this diversity in terms of formal features of village organization—familiar ground for every anthropologist. Islamic communities are located next to Bali Hindu villages; in some villages hierarchical notions are emphasized, whereas in the old Bali Aga villages an egalitarian ideology dominates. Part 2 ends with a discussion of the relationship between these formal institutional features (including collective conceptions and values) and Balinese individual practice. Although formal values and institutions do to a large extent structure the world in which people live, they do not explain how people act. In order to understand Balinese in action we need to know more about their intentions and interpretations.

Before Barth develops his analysis to this level, he discusses in part 3 some other familiar phenomena: marriage in relationship with economic survival, leadership, factionalism, and violence. Despite all the variations in North Bali there seems to be an important convergence. Barth shows that formal organizations eventuate not in separate fields of social action but in a single arena in which Balinese live and that, despite the overwhelming emphasis on consensus and harmony, factionalism prevails in everyday practice. Talking in terms of "function," Barth argues that divisive factionalism has the effect of relieving the pressures upon Balinese to conform to dominant ideas about consensus and cooperation. Through factionalism the interests of individuals are defended.

Then, in chapter 10, Barth presents his model. Citing Max Weber, he distinguishes between events (the perceptual things that happen) and acts (human behavior as interpreted within a cultural framework of meanings) (p. 158). The crucial question is of course how an anthropologist, starting from the "outside" (an event), can get access to the "inside" (an act). Barth argues that to do so one should concentrate on the intentions and inter-

pretations of the people themselves. He believes that this is possible “with a reasonable amount of patience and genuine interest in the lives of particular individuals” and “through observation, reflection, conversation, and participation, i.e., through social and cultural immersion” (p. 160). Barth contrasts his position with the ideas of anthropologists such as Jane Belo, Gregory Bateson, Margaret Mead, and, of course, Clifford Geertz, who proposed a rather simple congruence between the formal rules of institutions, observed patterns of behavior, and the intentions and interpretations of the people involved. Following his partner Unni Wikan (1990), Barth advocates an anthropology of experience in which access to individual intentions and interpretations is the key to a better understanding of the basic concerns of the Balinese as participants in complex but particular social settings.

Balinese have various traditions of knowledge that inform their intentions, and through their interpretations of social action they inform, and may change, these traditions. Barth provides in part 4 an overview of five traditions that are, for the sake of clarity, rather artificially separated: Islam, Bali Hinduism (characterized by a de-centered pluralism), a third tradition having to do with notions of hierarchy derived from the old royal centre versus egalitarian principles maintained in villages that were never incorporated into the kingdom, a fourth representing the influence of modernity in terms of material wealth, education, and administration, and a fifth, sorcery, a kind of undercurrent affecting the perceptions of virtually every Balinese.

Finally, Barth presents in part 5 three case studies that illustrate how individual Balinese, in particular social settings and using various traditions of knowledge, shape and interpret their actions. One case is that of an elopement in an Islamic village and the conflicts connected with it. Instead of reconstructing this case, Barth elaborates on the different interpretations of the various actors. In doing so he succeeds in transforming the event into a complex set of meaningful acts that reveal certain collective concerns. The second case, that of a man called Nyoman, shows the many concerns that Balinese have to take into account in maintaining their equilibrium in their immediate environment. These case studies are intended to illustrate not only that different traditions of knowledge are part of individual lives but also that they are embedded in specific social settings within which their truth and relevance must be understood.

One of the points Barth wants to emphasize is that instead of representing culture in terms of abstract classifications of social structure or coherent sets of cultural values, anthropological research should focus on collective concerns. The third case study, that of a ritual that took place in 1949, at the end of the revolution, illustrates this. An old story about the tragic death of two lovers suddenly became the core of an emotional and chaotic cremation ritual during which various groups and individuals tried to impose their own interpretations on what was happening. Since then the meanings attached to this event have been subject to constant

fluctuation. One of the dominant themes in Balinese society that emerges from this case, according to Barth, is that unconstrained love represents freedom from the many pressures with which Balinese have to cope in their daily lives.

Barth concludes his book with a summary of his theoretical and methodological argument that is to my knowledge the most detailed elaboration to date of the implications of a practice approach in anthropology.

There are, however, a few points that worry me. The information on North Bali remains too general because the theoretical argument—which tends to become repetitive—consumes too much space whereas only the three case studies bring us, after 270 pages, to the core of Balinese concerns. I would have preferred a better balance between theory and empirical data. The spelling of some Balinese words is simply wrong; for instance, *mranjan* (“house temple,” not an unimportant word) should be *mrajan*. Moreover, the statement on p. 216 that nearly half of the palmleaf manuscripts in North Bali have been lost because of the establishment of a provincial library rests on fantasy; on the contrary, this library, which has mainly copies of manuscripts, has stimulated the circulation of texts.

Moving from “Baliology” to more general issues, two critical comments must be made. Barth clearly elaborates a practice approach, but he seems to overlook the near-synonymy of practice and history (see Ortner 1984:158). I miss in *Balinese Worlds* a true historical perspective. Historical research reveals, for instance, that in contrast to the situation in South Bali royal power in North Bali was to a large extent seaborne (Schulte Nordholt n.d.), a point which has serious consequences for Barth’s analysis of the impact of court culture (chap. 13). Furthermore, because of the early colonial presence in the second part of the 19th century, North Bali underwent significant changes that affected the occupation of land, export patterns, and the status of Islamic communities. In contrast, Barth presents a picture of relatively closed village communities which have only recently been exposed to influences from the outside world. Related to this is a second point: By and large, Barth seems to ignore the changes brought by the colonial state in Bali. Even the presence of the modern Indonesian state is hardly mentioned; three pages (pp. 244–46) are devoted to this subject. I suspect, however, that the impact of state institutions such as the Parisada Hindu Dharma is much greater than Barth seems to suggest. It is true that the state does not represent a tradition of knowledge, but state institutions have created wider arenas in which North Balinese villagers participate. In this context, the influence of islandwide rituals on local ideas and practices should not be underestimated. Besides, nowadays many families, even in rather isolated villages with an egalitarian ideology, aspire to noble titles in emulation of developments in the south of the island. In other words, the impact of longer historical processes and state institutions should be part of the analytical model of complex societies as well.

Despite these critical comments, this book is a con-

vincing argument against the postmodern armchair anthropology of the 1980s, which tended to focus on the world as a text. *Balinese Worlds* is a convincing and sympathetic plea for the crucial interaction between theory and fieldwork in which individual human beings, within the fluctuating complexity of their society, and their personal concerns are of central importance. It should be on the reading list for every advanced course in anthropology.

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Polemic against Dumontian Orthodoxy

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The Interpretation of Caste. By Declan Quigley. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993. 184 pp. £30

Declan Quigley's premise in *The Interpretation of Caste* is that "it is impossible to explain caste as the product of a particular ideology" (p. 1), and therefore it comes as no surprise that his book is primarily a critique of Dumontian orthodoxy. He nails his own alternative colours to the mast from the start, declaring Hocart's to be "the only plausible theory of Hindu society" (p. 4).

Chapter 1 discusses the term "caste" itself and the confusion caused by its use to translate both *varṇa* and *jāti*. Most Hindus and foreign writers get round this by seeing *jātis* as empirical entities and *varṇas* as theoretical categories based on economic or ritual function. The problem with this, says Quigley, is that South Asians engage in "endless dispute about which *jāti* belongs to which *varṇa*" (p. 7), but this objection seems to confuse general theories with their application in particular cases. It is odd indeed to argue against seeing *varṇa* as a form of classification on the grounds that it is in fact often used as such! Similar difficulties arise with Quigley's "demonstration" (by the contrived means of a hypothetical conversation with an imaginary Rajput) that the terms *jāti* and *varṇa* are used in everyday speech in flexible, contextual ways. Why this should be problematic when every first-year anthropology course stresses the contextuality of all such knowledge is not at all clear. Does all this reveal a basic misunderstanding of what theories are for? There cannot be an emic theory of caste which all Indians apply in wholly consensual

fashion (or an etic one which wholly accounts for all ethnographic observations); what Quigley's analysis seems not to recognise is that caste status is a contested field within a political process.

Materialist approaches to caste are dismissed in passing rather than confronted directly, because Quigley's main aim is to oppose any tendency for South Asian anthropology to become "culturology" rather than true comparative sociology. In criticising those "who put the ultimate weight of their explanation of caste in terms of Hindu ideas" (p. 13), he is of course implicating Dumont again, but his central targets at this point are certain (unspecified) recent writers whom he sees as engaged in a politically correct "moral crusade" (p. 13) against post-colonial anthropology. Taken to its limits, he notes, this position renders comparative anthropology not only ideologically suspect but practically impossible. Yet he accepts other parts of the Orientalist critique, notably that one intellectual legacy of the colonial régime was a tacit but now widely questioned assumption that caste had been a "traditional," unchanging institution prior to British hegemony.

Chapters 2 and 3 provide a detailed critique of *Homo Hierarchicus*. In light of his later work, Dumont's book now appears above all as an empirical investigation of the contrast between traditional societies with holistic moral codes and modern ones which stress individualism (p. 25). Dumont discerns three specifically South Asian aspects of holism: (1) the "principle of hierarchy in 'the caste system' is the opposition of the pure and the impure" (p. 25); (2) the "fundamental characteristic of the caste system [is] the hierarchical disjunction between status and power" (p. 25); and (3) the "structure of the caste system is to be found in the relations between the elements, not in the 'substantialist' nature of the elements themselves" (p. 32). Quigley plays down the first proposition on the grounds that the pure-impure opposition is found in all societies (p. 45)—but surely Mary Douglas, who is cited on this issue, recognised that societies handle such ideas differently and acknowledged a distinctive Indian recension of them? The second proposition meets the familiar criticism that it brushes aside a mass of contrary empirical evidence, but Dumont is then taken to task for not following his third precept ("as uniquely penetrating as it is poorly understood" [p. 32]) as rigorously as Quigley would wish. For example, he tends to substantialise purity as a Brahman attribute par excellence, whereas according to his own logic it should be "entirely relative" (p. 53). Quigley concludes that the insights gained from Dumont's theory come from the questions asked rather than the answers offered. Moreover, his second proposition is methodologically misguided, for although status and power are indeed disjoined according to Brahmanic ideology, "they are necessarily conjoined" in practice (p. 39). Precisely because of its claimed transcendence, Brahmanic ideology cannot acknowledge its own historicity and so cannot say anything about the circumstances under which it is espoused or rejected—the very task which comparative sociology must undertake.