



Review

Reviewed Work(s): Nuaulu Settlement and Ecology: An Approach to the Environmental Relations of an Eastern Indonesian Community. by Roy F. Ellen

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it must have meaning for the carriers of the tradition. At the same time, much of the meaning of folkloristic phantasy which the analyst unravels is unconscious. Dundes thus entertains simultaneously two assumptions: the first one is that folklore and cultural symbols are meaningful to people, otherwise they would not perpetuate them; the second one is that meaning does not have to be conscious. In his analytical practice, however, he puts into operation only his second assumption. But this means that much of the meaning of symbolism is meaningful only to Dundes himself. If we are prepared to go along with him in seeing folklore as reflecting concerns and anxieties, and if we accept his statement that interpretation of folklore can involve as much symbolic projection as folklore itself, would our claim that his interpretation of folklore is indicative solely of his concerns and anxieties be less justified than his claim that folklore is the projection of concerns and anxieties of those who transmit it?

It has to be stressed, however, that *Interpreting folklore* is, in its controversiality, a very significant and useful book, because it brings into light unresolved conceptual and epistemological problems, which are relevant not only to psychological or psychoanalytic approaches to the study of culture, but to all analytical approaches which in one way or another assume the existence of meaning on the non-conscious level. In his book, Dundes brings into focus many other issues as well. For one, his warning that our descriptions of the nature of objective reality in supposedly culture-free terms may in fact be determined by our own cultural cognitive categories, and that our supposedly culture-free analytical categories may be in fact ethnocentric extensions of our own native categories (pp. 154 sqq.), is of considerable merit.

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ELLEN, ROY F. *Nuauulu settlement and ecology: an approach to the environmental relations of an eastern Indonesian community* (Verh. k. Inst. Taal-, Land-Volkenk. 83). xii, 265 pp., maps, tables, bibliogr. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff 1978. Dfl. 60

This book concentrates on the productive relations with their environment of the Nua'ulu, a small Alifuru group in the immediate hinterland of the south coast of central Seram. The Nua'ulu make their living partly by using non-domesticated resources—hunting and gathering, especially the harvesting of wild sago, contribute c. 40 per cent. of the calorific intake—and partly from swidden cultivation of taro, yams, manioc, bananas, etc., which contribute about 60 per cent. However, the swidden lands are increasingly being converted into groves planted with coconuts, cloves and other cash-

crops, and now represent about one-third of the cultivated area.

The book constitutes an important contribution to the study of human ecology. It contains a wealth of ethnographic data, and the doctoral thesis on which it is based may have contained still more (occasional references to things allegedly mentioned before, which in fact remained unmentioned, and repeated references to Map 6 instead of (as now) Map 7 may bother the reader). These data have been subjected to an analysis which Ellen calls 'generative'; in my opinion he should have chosen a less ambitious term. According to Ellen (p. 200) 'the predictive value of the generative approach adopted here is . . . limited', but I doubt whether his model can really predict anything, and I would judge even its explanatory value to be limited. Ellen has succeeded in identifying a considerable number of 'pressures' or 'factors', which can be regarded as either 'given' or subject to conscious manipulation. But he has not been able to calculate, or even to show the relative importance of these factors, independently from the outcome. They remain largely incommensurable, both in our and, what is more important, the native categorical system. The book contains some very valuable material regarding the transformation of a subsistence economy into a peripheral market economy, but Ellen's theoretical frame, oriented towards systems analysis, is not really able to cope with it, so that we are told that 'no one overwhelming class of factors or orientations . . . can be said to dominate the Nuauulu relationship with their environment' (p. 199). An analytical frame which lacks indicators showing us how and why one factor overrides the other can, at best, make some plausible suggestions; it is unable, however, to 'generate' hypotheses which are subject to testing. As we have known for some time, the effective, relative importance of what can be called pressures and factors reveals itself best in processes of change, and the study of change requires a historical perspective. For example, swidden plots not only have their systemic diachrony to be analysed through synchronic comparison, but they also have individual histories to be collected from those who shaped them, and the latter may even be able to communicate some of the reasons for their decisions. It is really this human dimension, which can transform a class of 'social or ideational factors' into reality, that an anthropologist might miss in Ellen's work.

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FLEMING, PATRICIA HARVEY. *Villagers and strangers: an English proletarian village over four centuries*. viii, 168 pp., illus., map, bibliogr. Cambridge, Mass.: Schenkman, 1979