

Culture



Gregory FORTH, *Space and Place in Eastern Indonesia, Kent: Centre of South-East Asian Studies, University of Canterbury, 1991, Occasional Paper No. 16; 85 pages. £3.00*

E. D. Lewis

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Gregory FORTH, *Space and Place in Eastern Indonesia*, Kent: Centre of South-East Asian Studies, University of Canterbury, 1991, Occasional Paper No. 16; 85 pages. £3.00.

By E.D. Lewis
The University of Melbourne

Forth's *Space and Place in Eastern Indonesia* consists of two essays, "A Comparative Analysis of Spatial Symbolism in Nage (Central Flores) and Eastern Sumbanese Houses" and "On the Category of Place in Eastern Sumba", which address complementary themes: the modulation and symbolism of space in houses and the category "place" as an operator for locating persons in society.

In the first essay, Forth's starting point is a problem arising from the comparative ethnology of Nage and Sumba. In Nage, rites of offering to ancestors and other spiritual entities take place in that part of the house represented as feminine, but the people on whose behalf these rites are conducted are related to the ancestors patrilineally and the ancestors themselves are conceived as male. In eastern Sumba, where group membership is also reckoned in terms of descent through men from male ancestors, such rites take place in that part of the house represented as masculine. Forth's problem is "why there should be such a difference in spatial organisation and symbolic use of the house" (9) in these closely related cultures.

Nage houses incorporate rectilinear divisions which are represented in terms of gender divisions. The outside of the house is masculine and the house is a feminine space. Divisions of the inside of the house recapitulate the first division: the front of the house is masculine, whereas the interior of the house is feminine. The interior of the house is recursively divided into a masculine back portion and a feminine front portion. The house's hearth is in the interior, feminine part of the house and borders the interior masculine part. The main post of the hearth is located on the boundary between these two portions of the interior, and it is there that male ritualists perform the rites of the house. There is, however, an interesting and problematic inversion of the gender classifications which map the parts of the house: the verandah is "front" and the interior of the house is "back", but within the interior, the masculine area is farther back than the feminine area, which is front. This ambigu-

ous feature of the classification of space in the house is resolved by a shift of perspective. Whereas the associations of the larger divisions hold when looking from the outside inward, the associations of the divisions inside the house hold when viewed from the inside outward.

Overall, the categories of the Nage house accord with the logic of recursive complementarity, whereby a single dualistic contrast, masculine/feminine, is employed at all levels of classification: outside the house/inside the house, verandah/interior, interior back/interior front. At the heart of the structure is a point, the hearth post, which is both feminine and masculine and at which the categorical system dissolves into an ambiguous unity.

In contrast to the Nage house, which manifests a diametric structure, the Sumbanese house manifests a concentric structure. At the centre of the Sumbanese house is a single hearth which "combines male and female qualities" (40). Thus, whereas in the Nage house the hearth is ambiguously feminine and masculine, in the Sumbanese house male and female occupy the same point. The space around the hearth is divided into four parts by the cross-cutting of two distinctions: right/left and front/back. Right and front are conceived as masculine whereas left and back are feminine. The right front of the house, the most masculine area, is the site of offerings while the left back of the house, the most feminine, is where women give birth. Although the two houses have different structures, the Nage and eastern Sumbanese employ the same categorical distinctions to give meaning to these structures, meanings which are represented in terms of the symbolic contrasts of gender.

This closely reasoned essay is convincing in its analysis of the symbolization of space, but Forth does not forget his first question. The Sumbanese priest conducts his rites in a masculine space next to an architectonically defined centre (the hearth) whereas the Nage house has no such centre. The Nage priest performs his rites not in a space, but at a point, the "central hearth pillar." It is the nature of the centre which is important and not the space in which the priest does his work, which is, in any case, determined by the structure of the house in which the rites occur. Despite superficial dissimilarities, Forth concludes that "Nage and eastern Sumbanese . . . employ the same principles in creating physical and symbolic order, though in remarkably variant ways" (51).

In the second essay, "On the Category of Place in Eastern Sumba," Forth's intention is "to demonstrate several ways in which 'place' operates as a major category informing aspects of social order, practice and ideation" (56) in the domain of Rindi. The argument is that discriminations of "place" in the plan of a village are linked to the classifications which govern the ranking of the major groups (clans and lineages) of the community. The essay is an exploration of the semantics of the Sumbanese term *ngia*, which means "place" but which also means "kind, type, species" and which is linked in ritual language to the word *ngera*, which means "part, share, responsibility, duty, obligation" and "social position." In Sumbanese the terms for physical space and social identity are all but synonymous.

Placement, both in the physical landscape and in society, implies movement. To be placed is *màndungu*, "fixed, firm, secure, settled." While one properly located in society is *màndungu*, one also moves in society as when one has changed one's social category through a rite of transition or has married. Wherever the exigencies of social life may take a person, he is said always to reside in his clan's ancestral house which is located in relation to other houses in terms of the precedence of the group attached to it.

These essays are a worthy addendum to Forth's earlier, encyclopedic monograph *Rindi: An Ethnographic Study of a Traditional Domain in Eastern Sumba* and are a good indicator of the direction of his more recent work in Nage.

Edward T. HALL, *An Anthropology of Modern Life. An Autobiography*, New York: Doubleday, 1992. 269 pages, \$24.50 (cloth).

By Philip Moore
Curtin University of Technology

Hall's work is well known in anthropology; yet it is fair to say that his work has been most influential beyond the discipline. Here Hall presents an autobiographical account of the first fifty years of his life, from earliest memories to 1963. He shows how his interests as an anthropologist can be understood when related to the events of his life. Contrary to the ordering of the book's title and sub-title, the book contains more autobiography than anthropology. It is not so much about "the anthropology of everyday

life," as this phrase might normally be taken, but about the anthropology of Hall's own life — the private and public events and the people that Hall believes have most influenced him.

The volume comprises an Introduction followed by twenty chapters divided into four chronological/geographical sections. The Four Parts deal with: his early family life and schooling — "Early Days: 1914-1931"; his first work experiences in the Indian Service — "Indian Country in the Thirties: 1932-1935"; his university training, as an archaeologist, and experiences during and immediately following WW II — "Transitions: 1935-1949"; and the beginning of his academic career through his time at the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) of the State Department — "Washington, D.C.: 1950-1963." The division of the book in this way locates Hall's career in space and time and emphasises that his private life experiences are intertwined with the public development of his anthropology. Hall came rather late to the discipline, formally entering anthropology only after a period of employment. Throughout the book the impression Hall works to convey is of himself as a practical man, independent and skilled in looking after himself and well suited to applying anthropology beyond the confines of university teaching and research.

While Hall has been a publicly successful anthropologist, his influence and analytical interests have been quite marginal in the development of American anthropology. He speculates about whether or not this had something to do with his failure to tie himself and his work to some big name in the discipline (p. 247). Instead, Hall chose to follow his own sense of problem and direction and in his autobiography the connections between his work and the development of American anthropology are not very well developed. It is telling that anthropologists are not often referred to in Hall's text. A brief scan of the bibliography illustrates this point: apart from reference to Hall's own work, mentions of other anthropologists are few. Indeed, if one were to read the reference to others as significant — in the text and in the bibliography — it is artists and psychiatrists who have had the greatest influence on Hall's work. Not only does he acknowledge the significant effect of psychoanalysis on his own life, but he also identifies how the methodology of his psychoanalysis has informed his own analytical techniques. Hall's 1949 paper, on ethnic strife in Denver, Colorado, is grounded in a creative application of one of Freud's methods so that a reading of cultural "slips" can be used to understand meanings "beyond cul-