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Frederick K. ERRINGTON, *Manners and Meaning in West Sumatra: The Social Context of Consciousness*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984. 175 pages, US $20 (cloth)

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stems from a commitment to the empirical tradition, which denies the validity of essences while reifying surface appearances. The author seems to assign an undue measure of significance to the content of individual and family histories in a search for explanatory clues. The case material is thus extended beyond the realm of mere illustration and metaphor and given explanatory weight. In combing the domain of individuality, one is inevitably led into the area of human motivation that informs decisions to follow various courses of action. To the extent that what is uncovered here does provide explanations, it can only account for why certain decisions are made at the individual level. But it is to skip a number of levels of analysis to make causal connections between human psychology and socio-historical processes. The variation uncovered in this arena undermines systematic interpretation and, perforce, one arrives at the conclusion that social transformation is in the end fortuitous—an historical accident, a view to which she manifestly does not subscribe given her analysis of history, state and economy. Yet she is led to this proposition. Perhaps this is more due to the problematic and rather narrow definition of social change itself. Harding regards social change, in essence, as the disintegration of a way of life or cultural death, which by tautology seems to feed into its characterization as historical accident. People follow actions to ensure the survival of their own culture as represented by a certain way of life. If their strategies nevertheless result in the disintegration of a variety of "traditional" production practices, social relations and cultural habits, this cannot be a desired state. Therefore, these consequences are unintended. It follows then that social change *qua* cultural death is unintended. Whether social change, narrowly or broadly defined, is intentional or unintentional seems less the issue than the need to understand the logic of historical transformation. Fortunately, Harding does not draw greatly on her own formulation for the purposes of describing the transformations in Ibieca except in the final chapters of the book, where there seems to be some equivocation over the complete cultural death of Ibieca, over those aspects of village life that have died and those that live on. Had Harding been less preoccupied with the idea of the passing of the old order and concentrated on change as a process whereby forms become transformed, such vascillation could be dispensed with. But this is a minor point. Despite the excursus into the indeterminant which detracts from the overall coherence of the study, Harding does in fact present a highly systematic account of rural transformation.

Frederick K. ERRINGTON, *Manners and Meaning in West Sumatra: The Social Context of Consciousness*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984. 175 pages, US $20 (cloth).

By Franz von Benda-Beckmann
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Errington has portrayed one aspect of Minangkabau culture and social life which has been largely neglected in the numerous publications about this society which have appeared during the past twenty years: the ways in which Minangkabau men talk about, interpret, enact and show off their *adaik*, Indonesian: *adat*. *Adat* is their cultural universe; the word *adat* is an umbrella term covering law, social and political organization, customary behaviour patterns, etiquette and also those elements of the sacral and magic universe which have not yet been fully superseded by Islam. The red thread through *adat* is the concern with the ideology of matrilineal descent and its manifestations in the various fields of social life. Minangkabau *adat* has always fascinated western (but also eastern) observers. "Most members of western culture", says Errington, "would find the Minang exceptional, not because they also explicitly interpret their culture, but because they interpret it so much" (p. 93). Errington's account, based on 6 months field research in the village of Bayur, is very well written. It is also very personal. He lets the reader share his experiences: how he was initiated into the proper behaviour *(baso basi)*; his conversations with men, and lineage heads, *panghulu*, in particular, who are the real experts in *adat*; his admiration and surprise at their eloquence, the ease with which they reproduce innumerable *adat* proverbs and sayings, master the ceremonial *adat* language full of allusions and with which they make sense of everything—social and political changes, new technologies, etc.—in terms of *adat*. Everyone who has lived in West Sumatra for some time will immediately recognize the pictures evoked in Errington's book and certify to their beauty and likeness. Equally interesting and readable are the chapters on the ceremonies around the ascension to *panghuluship* ("*Adaik* Incarnate") and the pig hunt—the social forms which Errington sees as the extreme poles in Minangkabau men's life: The former showing a maximum of constraint within ceremonial enclosure, the latter the expression of freedom in which an abundance of energy, capacity for violence, anger and malice are acted out. This makes Errington's book a very welcome and important contribution to the literature on Minangkabau.

Equally striking as its strengths, however, are the weaknesses of this book. Errington sets out to examine the ways Minangkabau interpret their *adat* and social life. His analysis is built upon the concepts of interpretation, sign and symbol, and on the elucidation of the contrast in interpretative style between the Minangkabau and "us" westerners. The Minangkabau explain and interpret in terms of signs. Signs do not need to present, create or reveal, but only to illustrate truth. And truth in Minangkabau is, and has to be, everywhere. Interpretation for Minangkabau consists in replication through showing correspondence of form. This replication usually consists either in pairing a form, or an aspect of form (of an *adat* maxim) with another form or aspect of form which is regarded as true (the laws of nature, for instance), or in the pairing of an aphorism with an actual situation. These pairings take the form of illustration and analogy (159). Such replications are simple signs, easily learnt and manipulable; they serve the Minangkabau to give meaning to anything in their terms. *Adat* thus becomes persuasive of social life and change. "We" westerners (Marx, Freud et al.) in contrast tend to interpret in terms of symbols, which function as "the best possible expression of a relatively unknown fact" (95). Symbols make possible at least oblique recognition of that which would resist direct understanding; they are relatively resistant to drastic change and manipulations. Minangkabau do not interpret in terms of symbols; hence symbolic anthropology looking for hidden deep meanings would be an inappropriate tool to analyse Minangkabau epistemology.

While Errington has undoubtedly captured well the nature of Minangkabau *adat* proverbs and maxims and their reproduction in some social contexts, his analysis is far too impressionistic and his theoretical concepts far too limited to evoke any enthusiasm. In fact he is concerned with and writes about a multitude of quite different questions: 1) How do the Minangkabau explain the origin and content of their *adat*? 2) How do they reproduce *adat* through the generations, why do they do it in such an extreme form? 3) How do the Minangkabau interpret social life, cultural artifacts, individual behaviour, social change? How do they do so in terms of *adat*? And why do they tend to give meaning to "everything" in terms of *adat*? 4) How do they use *adat* as a means of communication?

Errington does not distinguish these questions. His analysis, however, gives partial answers to most of them. How all these questions could be dealt with through the one concept of interpretation and through references to a very limited number of ideas and writers; how such a analysis can be carried out without any reference to the insights developed in the sociology of knowledge/social construction of reality literature is not only incomprehensible, it is unpardonable in a book with such theoretical pretension.

Besides, Errington confronts the reader with only a limited set of social contexts in which Minangkabau (men) talk, explain, and interpret in terms of *adat*. We hear nothing of actual decision-making processes where (alleged) occurrences, behaviour and normative claims are evaluated in *adat* concepts and standards, where *adat* interpretations are negotiated and manipulated in political games and intrigues. We hear nothing of political manoeuvering where *adat* is used to obscure and distort truth, where cheating and intimidation is rationalized and justified in *adat* terms. We get no example (although they are hinted at) where ritual and allusive *adat* language is used as a secret code in interpersonal communication. Surely the interpretation of *adat* in such everyday contexts would require more analytical concepts than sign and symbol. A comparison between the use of *adat* or western political ideology and cliches in Minangkabau village politics and American national politics would yield quite different results in interpretative style than Errington suggests. This is, I think, largely due to a probably limited field experience and an idealistic perspective on social life. Thus when describing the *adat* pertaining to the installation of *panghulu* and the actual enactment of *adat* in the installation processes, Errington leads us to believe that because of the nature of *adat* rules there is *indeed* no room for the development of political divisions between individuals or matrilineal groups, that there is indeed no competition between individuals for the *panghulu* title (p. 115). From my own and others' experiences in Minangkabau villages I know that there are intense rivalries about the succession to *panghulu* title, that these often lead to quarrels and definite cleavages between matrilineal groupings; the historical materials on Minangkabau village organization are full of similar stories. I find it difficult to believe that Bayur should be an exception in this respect; even if it should be, Errington should have said so. The absence of any political dimension in his analysis is particularly obvious in his description of the relation between *adat* and Islam. There is no analysis of the centuries old struggle of proponents of Islam and adat-purists to push their system as *the* system of interpretation and legitimation of social

order and to subvert their opponents' system by Islamicized interpretations of *adat* or *adaticized* interpretations of Islam. This underlying situation of pluralism of normative and interpretative subuniverses of meaning (*adat,* Islam, national ideology) probably is one of the dominant motives for Minangkabau village men and elders to subject anything to their *adat*-Weltanschauung, for *adat* is the only basis upon which they can legitimate their own political, economic and social positions of power. Again, there is quite a wealth of historical material, of *adat* literature written by Minangkabau experts of different political backgrounds, and contemporary research results which Errington could have used to broaden his analysis considerably.

Errington's book thus can be recommended as a very well written and interesting account of his field experience in one Minangkabau village; as a book claiming to give an analysis of "the" Minangkabau epistemology and the social contexts of Minangkabau consciousness it falls short of its goals.

Claude MARCIL et Danielle THIBAULT, *Le printemps indien*, Montréal, Éditions Québec/Amérique, 1985. 340 pages, préface de Léonard Paul. 16,95$.

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Il y a quelques années, je faisais remarquer à Claude Marcil qu'il n'y avait pas de livre français permettant à un public intéressé d'avoir une vue d'ensemble de l'histoire et de la situation socioculturelle des autochtones du Québec et de l'Amérique. Il m'avisa alors du parachèvement d'un manuscrit qui couvrait, selon lui, le sujet. En effet, *Le printemps indien* a été publié l'automne dernier.

Ce livre, préfacé par Léonard Paul, comprend douze chapitres qui essaient de cerner l'indianité à travers les siècles, dans les deux Amériques. Les quatre premiers chapitres, en guise de contrechamp, survolent quarante siècles d'histoire coloniale en 135 pages, avant de nous placer devant l'écran de l'actualité, soit du mitan des années 1960 jusqu'à aujourd'hui. Selon les auteurs, la renaissance indienne actuelle prit son essor lorsque des organisations et des associations politiques autochtones se mirent à revendiquer leurs droits et à proclamer la prise en charge de leur destinée.

Au cours de ma lecture, deux points majeurs ont retenu mon attention : l'absence de méthode analytique et la persistante sensation de ne rien apprendre au sujet des cultures autochtones. Bien sûr, les auteurs, malgré quelques erreurs, compilent des faits, des dates, des noms qui ajoutent à notre érudition. Par contre, l'analyse fait défaut puisqu'on demeure toujours au plan de l'inventaire, sans qu'aucune question soit posée convenablement.

Nous avons droit dans ce livre à une panoplie de clichés, de comparaisons moralisatrices et d'effets spéciaux un peu douteux. Encore une fois les autochtones nous sont présentés sans dynamisme social, c'est-à-dire comme des sociétés ne produisant pas d'inégalités sociales et pour qui le seul malheur fut d'avoir été en contact avec les Occidentaux. Encore une fois, les autochtones font figure de victimes n'ayant aucunement participé à l'histoire, collaboré à l'occasion à des événements majeurs et profité quelquefois de la situation. Encore une fois, tous les problèmes que vivent les communautés autochtones sont simplement dus au fait qu'elles sont autochtones. Ce n'est pas tout de vouloir attirer l'attention du public, il faut aussi l'informer. Cette dernière tâche exige d'aller au-delà des apparences et des idéologies qui masquent la réalité.

Les relations des autochtones avec les gouvernements ont façonné une nouvelle réalité sociale qui se manifeste dans toute une gamme de phénomènes. En fait, certains groupes autochtones expérimentent, au sein des sociétés canadienne et québécoise, les modèles les plus raffinés de communication, de consultation populaire et d'autonomie régionale ; d'autres allient les ressources de l'économie marchande au développement socio-culturel ; enfin, d'autres sont passés maîtres dans le fonctionnement des structures bureaucratiques. Ces réalisations ne doivent cependant pas camoufler les problèmes économiques et les difficultés d'adaptation rencontrés par la majorité des autochtones. Peu d'analystes, jusqu'à présent, ont réuni ces deux aspects de la réalité autochtone actuelle. Entre les statistiques officielles et les slogans politiques, entre les clichés des modes de vie traditionnelle et moderne, toute une réalité échappe le plus souvent à l'analyse et *Le printemps indien* n'y fait pas exception.