

Culture



Adam KUPER, *Wives for Cattle: Bridewealth and Marriage in Southern Africa*, London & Boston, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982. 202 pages, US \$34.95 (cloth)

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make here are minor indeed, as far as the value of the book is concerned. It is obviously essential reading for all anthropologists who work in this field and who cannot read the original, and Boon's introduction does provide a valid North American context.

Adam KUPER, *Wives for Cattle: Bridewealth and Marriage in Southern Africa*, London & Boston, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982. 202 pages, US \$34.95 (cloth).

By P.H. Gulliver
York University

In the author's words: "This book is concerned with the varieties of bridewealth institutions among the Southern Bantu" (p. 157) of southern Africa. Specifically, the societies concerned are Lovedu, Nguni, Swazi, Tsonga, Tawana and Venda, with lesser references to others in the same region. The book is written in that curious language, the ethnographic present, and deals with the so-called "traditional" forms of bridewealth institutions and their connections with other features of the social structures in which they operated. Except for half a dozen paragraphs in the concluding chapter, there is virtually nothing on "modern" bridewealth practices, because, as the author notes, present day information is inadequate.

The structure of the book is straightforward. First, there is a general review, based on the literature, of the Southern Bantu ideas—"the intellectual basis"—about men, women, cattle and fertility and their general rules concerning bridewealth transactions. Secondly, there is an examination of the political context of bridewealth, both in general for the Southern Bantu and with fairly detailed studies of four particular varieties: the Lovedu "marrying in", the Venda variant, the Swazi "marrying up" and the Tsonga "marrying out". Thirdly, the author concentrates on the theme of transformations around a common set of ideas with the intention of demonstrating that "the various local institutions represent highly constrained transformations of each other" (p. 157). That is to say, the several ideological forms are neither ad hoc solutions to local structures and their problems nor localized varieties of some great tradition.

It is this notion of transformations that ultimately is the chief concern of the author. He spe-

cifically disavows an intention to develop any general theory about bridewealth institutions—indeed, he is sceptical of the possibilities of such an endeavour—although he claims that his own general conclusions for the Southern Bantu have theoretical relevance for the further understanding of bridewealth and of alliance theory. It would, therefore, be unfair to criticize the author for neglecting something which he has chosen not to attempt. Nevertheless, it seems a pity that, after several years of study of Southern Bantu bridewealth, he should not have gone further and given us his ideas and opinions as to where and how the particular ethnographic cases contribute to the general theoretical ideas in social anthropology. In fact, Professor Kuper does, at the end of his book, discuss rather briefly some of the implications of his findings for general theory. However, for better or worse, it is mainly left to the readers to make what use they can of the analyses and conclusions of specific ethnography.

For readers who are already familiar and especially concerned with the Southern Bantu peoples, societies and cultures, the book will surely make fascinating reading. They will find themselves in the presence of an anthropologist who well knows the available data and who has carefully synthesized them to reinforce some old understandings and to produce some new ones. For such specialists, the book is a "must", although they will scarcely need this recommendation concerning a work by an anthropologist who has already made his mark on studies of that region of Africa.

For other readers, the book may prove to be hard going. Despite the relative shortness of the work and the competence of its prose, there is a lot of data, much detail and many ethnic and cultural distinctions to be borne in mind. Perhaps one gets lazy about other anthropologists' ethnography and seeks primarily for structural implications and analytical conclusions; and that is why it has become the habit of many anthropologists, when presented with another lot of ethnography, to turn to the final chapter and see what it has to offer to those whose ethnographic interest lies elsewhere. It happens to all of us. So what are we offered by this (possibly unfair) practice? In the final chapter's thirteen pages, we are given a brief review of the three sets of factors said to be responsible for variations in bridewealth institutions (viz: pastoral and agricultural conditions, cousin marriage rules and forms of political stratification), some diagrammatic models of bridewealth transfer and transformations of alliance, and a brief discussion of the useful potentiality of the structural implica-

tions of bridewealth. For those who are concerned with bridewealth and marriage institutions in particular, and also with the notion of ideological transformations, there is a good deal of interest here, if tantalizingly brief in exposition, and such readers may—as they should—be induced to attend more closely to the earlier chapters and the detailed analysis.

John Miller CHERNOFF, *African Rhythm and African Sensibility*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1979. 261 pages, US \$8.95 (paper).

By Chet Creider
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This is a marvelous book. In at least six respects it goes against the grain of conventional wisdom for anthropological work on Africa, yet it is successful on all counts. Very little which is new is said in the book about the formal and technical side of African music (the significant work of A.M. Jones here is often acknowledged). The work is strikingly different from the kind of single-people-based ethnography on which Africanist anthropologists have long prided themselves: numerous styles of numerous different peoples are treated, some in great detail, others just touched upon. The 'ethnographic present', insofar as this involves a reconstruction of earlier, 'traditional' ways is not present, and instead the work consistently cuts across traditional and modern African music and attempts to deal with both in a common framework. The author uses African rhythm as a springboard for a discussion of African social life: the book is subtitled, *Aesthetics and Social Action in African Musical Idioms*. It is clear that the work has been written to be read with profit by both professional anthropologists and lay people, by musicologists and the musically naive. Finally, the author has gone native. We are presented not with the haphazard participant observation found in most anthropological fieldwork, but with an account of a thorough-going apprenticeship in the technically difficult craft of drumming.

Despite these potential drawbacks this book is an unqualified success. Indeed, what at first sight appear to be weaknesses turn out to be significant strengths. The ethnographic reality in much of Africa and certainly that part of it which concerns Chernoff is one where numerous peoples are in

constant everyday interaction with one another, and it is one where traditional approaches, both with respect to technique and to social function, are strongly present in popular music. The tendency to superficiality which is present whenever anthropologists compare and contrast diverse peoples is held in check by Chernoff's grounding of his comparisons in the music and speech of actual musicians, both modern and traditional. His discussion of the technical aspects of musical organization and performance gives sufficient detail that the reader is fully aware of what is being talked about, but is clearly subordinated to his larger purposes. Although Chernoff's personal involvement with his subject is constantly present in the book, the work has none of the appearance of a work written while in the field. It is, rather, a scholarly work which happens to also be accessible to a wider audience and in which the author has utilized a novel approach to the collection of his data.

'Scholarship and participation' is the title of the introduction. The most detailed account of Chernoff's personal involvement with the music he studies is given here. Among the many points raised, the author's feeling that his purity of motive was important to what he was able to achieve is worth noting. Chernoff's study of African music was undertaken for the sake of his love for it and with no expectation of reaping any profit (academic, financial or personal are his categories).

The first chapter is entitled, "The Study of Music in Africa". A short eleven pages, it contrasts the separation of art and artistic performance from the everyday world in Western culture with the way in which music is integrated into 'social, economic and political life'. Succeeding chapters are entitled, 'Music in Africa', 'Style in Africa' and 'Values in Africa'; they move in the direction of increasing generalization to make tangible the nature of the involvement of music in the fabric of African culture. 'Music in Africa' presents the most technical discussion of the book: polymeter, call-and-response (and other 'conversational' procedures) are illustrated, and the general tendency to orient to 'silent' beats ('an African drummer concerns himself as much with the notes he does not play as with the accent he delivers') is discussed in detail. Even here the involvement of music in the rest of life is dealt with: lyrics with social commentary, drumming which is related to speech.

'Style in Africa' continues the technical discussion but now moves to a consideration of what good performance is. The deemphasis of flashy technique and the achievement of clarity of form through repetition with subtle variation are perhaps two