

## Culture



# Anne ALLISON, *Nightwork: Sexuality, Pleasure, and Corporate Masculinity in a Tokyo Hostess Club*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994. 226 pages, US \$14.95 (paper)

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For Nariño *memoristas* (indigenous historians) colonial documents and state laws are a major component of the stuff of history. This is again almost commonsensical, but it is a key facet of Rappaport's quiet critique of current fault lines in anthropological approaches to history making. Rappaport's approach enables her to elide the question of what really happened, in favour of the much more interesting issue of just how history is recalled in the face of current conditions and challenges. Neither external or internal structures of power are given a short shrift in this monograph, and for this reason alone it is a valuable addition to the literature.

If there is a problem with the work, it might be that the theoretical implications are not really elaborated and thus the book is more evocative than definitive in terms of the current debate about an adequate anthropological history. Yet Rappaport's contribution is one which anyone working in the area today would benefit from reading. Leaving aside the theoretical contribution that she makes, work of this subtlety and specificity should always be one of the very good things anthropology can bring to history both past and present.

Anne ALLISON, *Nightwork: Sexuality, Pleasure, and Corporate Masculinity in a Tokyo Hostess Club*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994. 226 pages, US \$14.95 (paper).

By Joe B. Moore

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Anne Allison's *Nightlife* is a fine study of elite Japanese salarymen at play in a high-class hostess club in Tokyo. Allison's stated objective is to provide an analysis of "masculinist behavior" of Japanese salarymen engaged in after-work nightlife situated within a wider historical, institutional, and ideological setting. In accordance with this objective, Allison focuses primarily on the male corporate employees who participate in "nightwork," though she gives a good deal of attention to the women with whom they play, and rather less to the women they marry.

The "nightwork" of the title refers to the mandatory afterwork gatherings which the large corporations encourage and pay for as a means for bringing the worker and corporation closer together,

and which result, necessarily, in subordinating the demands of home and family to the corporation (pp. 198-199). Allison pays particular attention to the three-cornered connection between salaryman, corporation, and family and demonstrates convincingly that the medium for the interconnection is the particular kind of male sexuality that is put on display in the hostess club.

This public affirmation of male sexuality is what Allison proposes to examine, with an eye toward drawing out "the implications of a phallogocentric practice in terms not only of the privileges it accords men but also the price it extracts from them" (p. 30). Allison does not assume that the hostess-club setting simply allows the expression of a "natural" sexuality of men, Japanese or otherwise. She makes the disclaimer that her "aim has not been to write a polemic on the chauvinistic or sexist attitudes of Japanese men in the nightlife or to reduce these behaviors to some essential attribute that is biologically male or universally patriarchal" (p. 30). Nor is she prepared to go along with the "cultural essentialists" who explain nightlife behavior as unique and comprehensible only in terms of Japanese cultural categories (pp. 79-83 and chap. 7).

Having discarded the easy explanations offered under the headings of biology, patriarchy, and Japanese cultural uniqueness – "Japanology of this latter kind has been the bane of Japanese studies for decades – Allison chooses to attack the problem from the direction of what might be called the culture of corporate capitalism. That is, of the three dimensions of nightwork that Allison scrutinizes – salaryman, corporation, family – it is the corporation that has the paramount role in the cultural construction of male salaryman sexuality, which it conditions and shapes to serve corporate needs (p. 150).

It might be argued that the Japanese employment system has worked outstandingly well since the 1950s in eliciting the loyalty and hardwork of salarymen without the kind of manipulation of sexuality that Allison analyzes here. There are at least two plausible answers to that criticism: that the sexual dimension was there all the time but unremarked; and that the corporations discovered and "developed" the sexual dimension during four decades of restless searching for ways to increase productivity. Unfortunately, Allison does not deliver on her promise to provide an adequate

not deliver on her promise to provide an adequate historical setting. So questions like these go largely unanswered. But on the contemporary situation she is incisive and compelling.

Allison's study addresses (though much less comprehensively) another of the central problems of contemporary Japanese life, the breakdown of the balance between work, family, home and personal life as the corporation has extended its claim to the totality of its male employees' time aside from sleep, bath, and riding on commuter trains (p. 100). While work has expanded until it takes in virtually the whole of the salaryman's waking moments and the company family has incorporated his personal life, the opposite has occurred with the family, which has become "feminized." Indeed, the degree of estrangement of work from family, of salaryman from wife that can be seen in contemporary Japan is pronounced (pp. 198-201). Yet it is also true that the part-time workforce has been feminized as well, through corporate efforts to drive down labor costs. This has put the wife and the "feminized" family under terrific strain. Here, too, a fuller historical context could have aided the reader in grasping the wider significance of the corporate in constructing and reproducing both male and female sexual roles.

If Allison's complex and ultimately convincing account of the ritualized form of corporate sexuality seen in hostess clubs were distilled into a phrase or two, it might be this: it is "a system that pumps them up as super-phallic and sutures this phallicism to their jobs. Corporate life depends upon a commensurability between the penis (real) and phallus (symbolic)" (p. 29). Allison quotes a union organizer as saying that "carousing in bars and clubs with paid-for women is what powerful men do in Japan" (p. 203). The hostess-club outing at company expense may facilitate so complete an identification between the salaryman's masculine potency and self-identity of salarymen and his service to the corporation (pp. 153-156) that he may not be able to function sexually with his wife during his working career and perhaps not at all after retirement separates him from the corporate "family" (pp. 188f). In such a setting he comes to prefer sex as a purely commercial transaction, all the more desirable because the purchaser of the service feels both powerful and free, able to subject another to his will without personal obligation.

Once maleness becomes subsumed to being an ardent corporate man both at work and at play, it provides the means for an intense bonding of salarymen one to another in the work group. Allison argues that the ideological form of corporate-constructed sexuality – the "play" with the hostesses in the clubs and the explanations offered for salaryman behavior (chapters 7 and 8) – has become so pervasive that it should be regarded as hegemonic: that is, invisible because it assumes the guise of common sense (pp. 13-14). For the company, the ultimate objective of nightwork, then, is to reinforce an ideology of corporate masculinity that is so powerful as to be beyond articulation, and therefore beyond questioning or resistance. On the contrary, the subject of corporate domination seem not to feel subjected, but privileged to be able to belong to the company. In sum, maleness = salaryman = power = sex.

In conclusion, Anne Allison has produced in *Nightwork* a fine study that illuminates salaryman sexuality as one important avenue by which the large capitalist enterprise in Japan has established its dominance. Everyone interested in what makes contemporary Japan tick should read it.

Paula BROWN, *Beyond a Mountain Valley: The Simbu of Papua New Guinea* Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995. 296 pages.

By Leslie Butt

McGill University

*Beyond a Mountain Valley* is an ambitious book that grows out of Paula Brown's long career as an ethnographer of the Simbu of Papua New Guinea. Brown has worked with the Simbu people since 1958; now as professor emerita at SUNY Stony Brook, she aims to present the history of the region both as the Simbu understand it and as she and others have recorded it. Brown wrote the first major comparative study of highland societies, *Highland Peoples of New Guinea* (1978, Cambridge University Press), and she has also covered Simbu land use, intergroup relations, exchange, leadership and gender relations over her long career. In this most recent work, Brown makes a significant contribution to the growing body of ethnohistorical compilations of Melanesian experiences: "I look to the Simbu view of their own history, the imprint