BOOK REVIEWS

Magical Medicine: A Nigerian Case-study. Una Maclean. London, Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1971; reprinted as a paperback by Pelican, 1974. 167 pp. £0.50p.

'Alero loro' is a familiar Yoruba saying translated into English as the jingle, 'Health is wealth'. The struggle to keep one's family fit, even to keep infants alive during their critical first years, can be harrowing in this tropical environment ridden with malaria and numerous infectious diseases. A significant contribution to anthropology could be made by a study of the guiding concepts in this search for well-being, the variety of methods and medicines used by Yoruba practitioners, and the complex system of esoteric knowledge transmitted from generation to generation without the written word. Magical Medicine: A Nigerian Case-study appears to make a start in this direction. The author, Una Maclean, a medical doctor (now professor of community medicine at the University of Edinburgh) spent seven years in Ibadan where she conducted research on cancer and traditional medicine as well as writing discerning articles on such topics as the plays of Wole Soyinka. Despite her long professional experience and her sympathy with local culture, this example shows clearly the wide division in theoretical foundations between medical sociology and social anthropology.

Only the surface manifestations of the various types of medical problems and treatments are described. Explanations are offered in "objective" terms, including a sprinkling of phrases from functional anthropology. ('It was stated earlier that in most respects the traditional practitioners' function is to restore social order...' 81) Dr. Maclean states in passing that Yoruba medicine has behind it a body of knowledge, yet she fails to understand the crucial point that an investigation of such inherited wisdom must start with indigenous classifications of disease symptoms, causes, and treatment--classifications which have many dimensions and cannot possibly be charted against those of Western medicine. Her approach, unfortunately, is to consider the data entirely within the conceptual grid of Western scientific categories: hence her title implying 'ours' is science, 'theirs' is magic.

Some of her assertions are misleading:

> In Yoruba belief, witches are always female, deriving their power from Eshu. Incorporating all the worst features of their sex, witches emasculate and weaken men, who are dependent upon women for pleasure and for offspring. (41-42).

Witches are always female? Only if the English word is considered to be female gender, in which case the proposition is of the same order as 'heroines are always female'. Although in Yorubaland witchcraft fears and accusations are expressed predominantly in terms of women, there are Yoruba words for both female (àjẹ́) and male (osó), often translated as witches and wizards. (An Ifa priest told me the proportion was about 10 women to one man.) And, while evil practices receive by far the greatest attention, those involved in witchcraft are said to be capable of extended powers of both good and evil. Yoruba ideas about witchcraft are thus woven in subtle opposition into a far more complex conceptual framework than Dr. Maclean's discussion allows.

She appears unaware of the importance of indigenous linguistic categories. For example, in the introductory section she describes the role of Shopanna, the god who is said to cause small-pox epidemics and

other serious physical and mental illnesses, yet in her analysis of 'sickness behaviour in the homes of Old Ibadan' she translates the word 'shopanna' literally as 'small-pox'. Although widespread vaccination campaigns have made small-pox rare in Ibadan, she accounts for the dread of this disease by the epidemic in 1957, still within recent memory. But to the Yoruba shopanna is a much wider classification than its literal translation; it includes various skin diseases and madness - all the illnesses attributed to the orisa (god). The intense fear continues, then, not only because there was a devastating outbreak of small-pox in the recent past but also because instances of shopanna in the wider meaning of the word are still occurring.

Dr. Maclean's approach in considering empirical observatins as prime evidence rather than examining Yoruba categories is demonstrated in her description of medical practitioners. She points out that there are two classes: the onishegun, who are primarily herbalists, and the babalawo, priests of the Ifa cult 'who specialize in divination followed by a type of psychotherapy'. And she adds the warning:

> But it would be wrong to exaggerate the division between the two, since a great deal of overlap in their functions is constantly occurring, the diviners using herbs in most treatments whilst practitioners who deal as a rule in herbal medicine may resort to simple methods of divination upon occasion. (75-76)

However much the treatments and the mud-walled consulting rooms of an onishegun and a babalawo may appear similar, Yoruba classifications place them in separate and distinct categories. The onishegun ('owner of medicine') treats minor illnesses with herbal remedies, while the babalawo ('father of mysteries') is skilled not only in the range of herbal medicines but also in the arduous discipline of the Ifa oracle. The difference is one of kind, not of degree. Like the onishegun, the babalawo is a herbalist; in addition he is doctor, psychiatrist, philosopher, priest and diviner, interpreter of destiny and guardian of the ancient secret knowledge.

The central significance of the Ifa oracle is not recognized. This is the complex system of divination based on a series of mathematical permutations and found in varying forms throughout West Africa. She accurately describes the two methods used in divining, but states, 'there are a total of 256 verses' (33). In fact, there are 16 times that many. The figures during the divining designate 16 principal sections of ritual poetry called odu, which again have 16 subdivisions, each of which has 16 verses (a total of 4,096). Some of these verses of Odu are highly symbolic poems with multiple levels of meaning, others are long narrative prose pieces telling the foundation of particular Yoruba towns or relating the acts of the gods, still others have to do with healing by herbal prescriptions accompanied by appropriate sacrifices. The Ifa oracle thus serves to structure a vast corpus of Yoruba knowledge in a form which can be transmitted through the discipline of memory from one generation of Ifa priests to the next. These thousands of verses of Odu are sometimes called the 'unwritten scriptures' of the Yoruba. At present they are being recorded by the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, and the completed project is expected to be a twenty-volume encyclopaedia of Yoruba religion and medicine, history and philosophy, myths, folktales, proverbs and poetry.

This is undoubtedly a difficult and elusive area of human experience: the quest for health, the warding off of misfortune, the treatment of illness. Dr. Maclean's research was extensive, but her methods

are open to question. For example, she describes one of her surveys (conducted by a Yoruba interpreter):

> The hundred healers who were interviewed came from all over Ibadan and they were discovered by a kind of snowball sampling method; when one person had been found and visited in a certain district, inquiries were made as to others practising in the area. In this way an eventual wide sweep of the town was accomplished. (76)

For more than one reason the 'snowball sampling method' would appear to be unsatisfactory in this tropical environment! She gives carefully-wrought statistics about the types of practitioners in the survey, their ages, who they learned from, what proportion were natives of Ibadan and what proportion were migrants; but these percentages cannot be thought of as other than a detailed description of the 'snowballed' group. Had a more sophisticated technique been used, then the sample might be considered representative of the total number of Ibadan's traditional healers. Yet any questionnaire, however expertly devised and executed, has limited scope. Most anthropologists would agree that intensive personal work with a few selected babalawo affords the possibility of deeper insights. For example, by observing traditional specialists in their daily treatment of mental patients and discussing the symptoms, the Canadian psychiatrist Raymond Prince was able to document the Yoruba classification of mental illnesses. (He also found that these traditional healers have been treating psychiatric patients for perhaps centuries with the powerful sedative, rauwolfia, a drug introduced into Western treatment only in 1949).

Two further questionnaires were administered to determine 'sickness behaviour in the homes of Old Ibadan' and 'sickness behaviour in elite Ibadan families'. The first, conducted in spoken Yoruba by university students, reached some 400 men and 106 women who were senior members of traditional households in a ward of Old Ibadan. The second was presented and answered in written English by some 162 boys and 120 girls who were pupils in the highest two forms of the city's secondary schools and whose parents were resident in Ibadan. Each of these surveys can be criticized on independent grounds, but even greater scepticism must be registered on the validity of using such uneven sources as a basis of comparison between traditional and elite families. Still the inevitable quantifications were produced as if somehow the elegance of the computations serves to refine the roughness of the method.

In the final chapter, 'The Tenacity of Traditional Medicine', she points out that it would be wrong to grant a monopoly of magical, irrational and superstitious ideas to those parts of the world called underdeveloped. Despite the general availability of medical facilities in Western societies, patients still consult herbalists, chiropractors, homeopaths, acupuncturists, faith healers and practitioners of various esoteric healing arts. Her argument becomes a criticism of Western medicine: its exaggerated emphasis on the diagnosis and cure of physical symptoms does not give sufficient attention to the social and psychological dimensions of illness. Thus when many Yorubas show a strong adherence to certain types of indigenous medicine in spite of the increasing familiarity with Western medicine, this is because in times of anxieties and stress traditional healers give attention to the spiritual states as well as the physical symptoms of patients. Nigerian medicine is changing with the times 'yet it retains the ability to supply meaningful answers to questions which are perceived as relevant by practitioner and patient alike' (155).

Her conclusions are admirable. But the analysis of the methods and the concepts of Yoruba traditional healing still awaits an anthropological study starting with a scrutiny of the Yoruba ordering of experience.

Helen Callaway.

Structuralist Analysis in Contemporary Social Thought: A Comparison of the theories of Claude Lévi-Strauss and Louis Althusser. Miriam Glucksmann. London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974. xiii 197 pp. £4.50p.

This book was, we are told, originally presented to the University of London as a Ph.D thesis in 1971. The hardback 1974 version retains the layout of an extended exam answer, produced by an examinee who only realises just how difficult the question is when it's too late to give up and start another.

After an amount of dithering in chapter I over what exactly the book is designed to elucidate, the auther sets off with the rather ill-defined intention of not only dealing with Levi-Strauss and Althusser, delineating "structuralism" and analysing its epistemology but also of providing a case study of structuralism in action while doing so. Unfortunately none of these aims attains fruition.

Glucksmann's remarks on the "meaning and uses of the term structure" in chapter 2 are unexceptionable and the conclusion is reached that there is a considerable difference between the usage of Radcliffe-Brown and that of Lévi-Strauss. The list of stock questions and concerns is trotted out, both at this stage and throughout the remainder of the book, but nothing particularly interesting and certainly nothing new is said. An impression is gained of a plan of attack fallen into considerable disrepair, and one becomes irritated by the apparent lack of control over the material in hand. For instance, Lévi-Strauss spills over into chapter 2 when he already has the whole of chapter 3 assigned to him and the same questions appear time and time again with scant regard for the professed organisation of the topics.

In dealing with Lévi-Strauss, Glucksmann notes that "Lévi-Strauss is sometimes interpreted as an idealist .... or as a psychological reductionist without inquiring into how this comes about. Twenty-four pages later she is accusing him of "implicit psychological reductionism" and in the introduction, presumably written well after the bulk of the work, he is a physiological redutionist although one supposes that this last could be some sort of printer's error. Suffice it to say that there is nothing in Glucksmann's discussion that is likely seriously to worry Lévi-Strauss.

The Althusser discussed is the one of For Marx and Reading Capital. The contents of Lenin and Philosophy are mentioned but not assimilated. As criticism of 1968-vintage Althusser, that offered by Glucksmann M. follows the path taken by Glucksmann A. (New Left Review) in attempting to highlight apparent contradictions in Althusser's work but, she fails to relate the areas of strain or to examine his key concepts in any depth. The result is a picture of Althusser's work which does make one wonder how he could have the gall to publish. Again a list of stock concerns is produced but answers provided do not go any deeper than was the case in discussing Lévi-Strauss.

The chapter on structuralist epistemology is nicely balanced but does not actually have much to say about epistemology; and the final chapter's search for a distinctive structuralist problematic ends in confusion. The questions posed throughout the book could not hope to be answered in the absence of a coherent strategy, and Glucksmann's claim (which appears at the beginning and end of the book) that she is using a structuralist approach capable of dealing with the problem is simply not substantiated by the intervening pages.

The book provides a summary of the stock debates and this alone would justify its inclusion in some departmental library. It does not, however, arrive at any interesting conclusions, and its style and organisation leave a lot to be desired. I would be surprised if anyone felt the need for a personal copy.

Paul Dresch.

The Women of Nar. Joyce Roper. London, Faber and Faber, 1974. 179 pp., illus. £2.85p.

When confronted by a book written by someone who claims to have no sociological or anthropological background, but, 'I loved travel. I loved people,' one is inevitably hesitant about what criterion to use in an assessment. Presumably any anthropologist would be able to write an account of his years in the field for general consumption, and to make it entertaining and informative. Joyce Roper has done more than this. She has made use of her specialist training as an artist to portray the visual aspects of her experience, and the details noted are both vivid and unobtrusive. Her impressions of the people with whom she involves the reader, express the same sort of sensitivity, In addition to this the candid honesty of her reactions, her mistakes, disappointments, and criticisms, give the book an objectivity often lacking in ethnographies. The reader gets a double perspective through understanding her, and therefore the filter through which the people and events are conveyed.

The chapter titles suggest that she has arranged her book according to anthropological conventions: Ceremonies; Ramazan; Festivals; Three Clans. It is thus easy for an anthropologist looking for specific observations to make use of her information. Her three years in the village of Nar are not presented chronologically, but the feeling of continuity in rural Turkey offsets the dramatic events which happened to her friends eliminating any affectation of a 'story'.

The book is therefore neither a novel, nor an attempt at field research. As such it does not fall between two stools, but can be used as the reader wishes without any intrusive bias from the author.

As the title indicates, Miss Roper intended to give a picture of the lives of the women in this single village. In a Muslim society this division of the sexes often necessitates a one sided account in ethnographies. Recently Mayer has presented an interesting picture of the economic reorganisation of wealth through associations of women. Miss Roper conveys a much needed balance to male accounts of social and religious organisation. The leadership of certain women in religious events, perpetuating family rivalries, providing bride payments, creating new networks of economic ties with the towns, outsiders and emigrant women working in Germany, indicate a few of the ways in which the study of women's independent initiation of relations is necessary for a more complete picture of the society.

Beyond this she makes us aware of the accepted subservience of women. One schoolgirl was accused of 'improper advances' to the young brother of the female deputy head of the local school by a male teacher who 'hated taking orders from a woman'. 'Her father took the gun off the wall to shoot her'. Another girl was deliberately estranged from her child and husband so that her German earnings could be used for her brother's marriage.

Without sentimentality or ethnocentric feminist zeal Miss Roper presents a clear portrait of those women trying to resolve 'the conflict between the old religion and the new ideal of womanhood'. From the point of view of womens' anthropology she succeeds in several ways. She deliberately exposes her subjective ethnocentric responses, and field-work mistakes. Her sympathy for the women and her growing insight into their problems and ideals enables her to observe many apparently unimportant details which later can be traced to reveal complex religious and economic associations which cut across traditional loyalties and hostilities. She deals with emotional problems of polygyny, barrenness, the fear of young brides bleeding to death, and the cruelties of female hierarchies, all of which seldom find a place in male ethnographies. Her involvement is genuine and objective, and permits her to present her people as people. This is important if we are to credit their acceptance of her, and her assessment of their behaviour and beliefs.

J.F. Blair.

Scholar Extraordinary: The Life of Professor The Rt. Hon. Friedrich Max Müller P.C. N.C. Chaudhuri. Chatto & Windus, London. 1974. x, 393 pp. £4.75p.

This is a book by an eminent Indian author about one of the most illustrious academic figures of the nineteenth century, who in some quarters is still fondly remembered as a personal link between East and West. It is the sort of work which general readers may find very pleasing, and about which those ubiquitous, unqualified, and occasionally impressively ignorant reviewers in newspapers and intellectual weeklies will doubtless write laudatory notices. The book does not contain many inaccuracies, and some would regard it as nicely written, but it is scarcely a gain to the academic world, and Chaudhuri provides us with no justification for its appearance.

Müller was certainly an extraordinary scholar; indeed, he covered such a vast area that contemporaries and later critics have more often than not wished to rob him of entitlement to scholarly status altogether. Those who were looking forward to a revealing intellectual biography will be severely disappointed: Chaudhuri is not 'except incidentally' concerned with discussing or evaluating Müller's ideas. This is just an account of the life of an academic, and this, one would have thought, was totally redundant in view of the Life and Letters produced by Müller's widow in 1902 - a work which is not only approximately three times as long as Chaudhuri's, but also far superior in organization. There is virtually nothing new in this recent biography save opinionated outbursts by Chaudhuri on Victorian Oxford, Victorian love affairs, and sundry other remarks that look like afterthoughts on his own autobiography.

The book which Chaudhuri originally wrote was apparently rather fuller than that eventually published. To render it a commercial proposition it has been abridged by another hand. Chaudhuri expresses satisfaction with the manner in which this was carried out, but the result seems awkwardly unbalanced. Some sections strike one as being quite unnecessary and self-indulgent, while several vital episodes in Müller's academic life which Chaudhuri's access to unpublished materials should have illuminated, are passed over very swiftly. This book may have been 'in press' for a longer period of time than is usual, but Chaudhuri seems reluctant to cite recent publications by others on Müller - he may even be unaware of the fact that there is actually considerable contemporary interest precisely in Müller's ideas.

The book contains a bibliographical appendix which not only contains several errors but is also severely deficient. Scholars will find this work the less helpful in view of the fact that Chaudhuri does not normally provide references to the literature he is quoting.

Malcolm Crick.

SHORTER NOTICES

The Ao Nagas. J.P. Mills. 2nd edition. Foreword by Henry Balfour. Supplementary notes and bibliography by J.H. Hutton. London. Oxford University Press. 1973. xxiv, 510 pp. illus. £3.80.

This is the first of three reprints of Mills' Naga ethnographies. The first edition of this work appeared in 1926, so one cannot complain if its anthropological style is rather old-fashioned. Like a number of government anthropologists Mills assembled large amounts of material, and presented them as simply as possible. The results are an excellent source-book, detailed without being pedantic. The reprint will be welcome to all those interested in the area, or anyone looking for raw data on which to base a piece of library research.

The Hill of Flutes: Life, Love and Poetry in Tribal India: A Portrait of the Santals. W.G. Archer. London. George Allen & Unwin. 1974. 375 pp. illus. £5.95.

Integrating a translation of oral literature with an account of tribal life in general, Archer succeeds more perhaps than any anthropologist in conveying the importance of that literature. Literature is not, or should not be, separated from the process of living, and perhaps only a rather romantic author could provide us with an account in terms of this interpenetration. The book has weaknesses and lacunae, but they are easily forgiven; if for no other reason, then at least for the large number of excellent photographs.

The Unappropriated People: Freedmen in the Slave Society of Barbados. Jerome F. Handler. London. Johns Hopkins University Press. 1974. xii, 225pp. illus. £5.

A contribution to the current spate of American slave literature examining the ambiguous role of freedmen in early 19th century Barbados. Strong on politics and demography, not so strong on ideology.

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