

OXFORD RESEARCH IN SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

ABSTRACTS OF THESES IN SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY
FOR WHICH HIGHER DEGREES WERE AWARDED
BY THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD IN 1986

Compiled by Helen Lambert

1. William KAVANAGH

La Nava de San Miguel: A Social Anthropological Study of a Spanish Mountain Village. D.Phil. (D69164/86)

This thesis, based on extensive fieldwork (from 1978 to 1985) at La Nava de San Miguel, a village in the province of Avila in central Spain, attempts to demonstrate six main points:

1. That the continued vitality of the village as a community is based on the economic factors of possession of large summer and autumn pastures near the village, transhumance to winter pastures

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JASO hopes to publish each year, in the Trinity Term issue, a set of abstracts for Oxford theses that were accepted during the previous calendar year. Readers interested in an earlier period may wish to consult Jonathan Webber, *Register of Theses in Social Anthropology Accepted for Higher Degrees at British Universities*, published in London by the RAI in 1983; it covers the years 1975-1980 and contains abstracts of 103 Oxford theses accepted during these six years.

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over the mountains in Extremadura, the cattle market at nearby El Barco de Avila, and virtual self-subsistence, all of which enable the villagers to maintain themselves as cattle raisers; and to the strength of: a) the village ideal of co-operation embodied in the use of the common known as the 'Sierra de Socios', the transhumant groups and the systems organized by the 'torno'; and b) the village ideal of mutual assistance shown at hay-making, pig-killing, and other aspects of daily life in the village.

2. That all co-operative institutions *inside* the village are organized by the principle of the 'torno', by which rights and obligations to these co-operative institutions rotate cyclically ('like a wheel which turns endlessly') and the village itself is conceived of by its inhabitants as essentially having no beginning and no end.

3. That the co-operative institution *outside* the village (the transhumant group which goes to the winter pastures in Extremadura) is not organized by the 'torno', since the villagers are members of the transhumant groups as individuals, free to change from one group to another, and decisions made by these groups are not controlled by the village as a community.

4. That the villagers conceptually divide the village and the surrounding territory into the 'realm of the men' (apart from the bar, *outside* the village) and the 'realm of the women' (*inside* the village).

5. That the people of La Nava conceptualize the world as consisting essentially of two parts: the complementary halves of themselves (their village and their region) and the land across the mountains to the south of them, Extremadura. The villagers radically contrast their village - regarded as cold, dark, and lacking in fertility - with the warmth, sun, and fertility of Extremadura.

6. That unlike affairs in the village organized to ensure continuity and equity by the principle of the 'torno' and following a movement of rotation, all relations with Extremadura are considered to move up and down in a lineal direction to ensure fertility and life when these are lacking in the village.

The thesis consists of four chapters: Chapter I looks at the physical situation, climatic conditions, historical background, and other introductory information; Chapter II examines the socio-economic institutions of the village - the 'Sierra de Socios', the systems of 'tornos' for herding the goats, irrigating the fields, etc.; Chapter III deals with the annual cycle of transhumance to and from Extremadura; and Chapter IV examines the 'world-view' of the villagers of La Nava - especially the symbolic aspects of this - and, in particular, the perception they have of their own identity in relation to Extremadura.

2. Joachim J.M. KNUF

Amulets as Tokens of Communication: A Comparative Analysis.
D.Phil. (D/69171/86)

Whereas in the past discussions of amulets have emphasized their 'magic' character, the present thesis explores the employment of amuletic tokens as tangible means in a special form of ritualized communication: it relates them to verbal and nonverbal forms of communication and explores the paradigmatic relationships obtaining between these modes from the point of view of pragmatics.

Chapter 1 lays out the etymological background of the study, traces some of the cogent arguments advanced in the anthropology of religion, and proceeds to accommodate the employment of amulets in a general theory of communication.

Chapter 2 studies the various semiogenetic processes by which material objects are transformed into significant tokens for communicative interaction: objects chosen for amulets are usually intrinsically or relationally salient in respect of time, place, and events. As they are material symbols, signification is also a production process, and hence its various stages and the principal modes of employment are discussed.

Chapter 3 supplies the necessary situational concretization of communicative behaviour employing amulets, discussing external determinants such as time, place, and the social categories of interactors involved; both chapters arrange the ethnographic evidence not by historical or typological, i.e. semantic standards but in an original, pragmatic fashion thus allowing an intercultural comparison of tokens based on an analysis of problem-solving behaviour.

Chapter 4 looks at the use of amulets from a proxemic point of view, compares it to other behavioural options in this field and develops from this basis the mechanical requirements to which amulets essentially answer; this chapter also addresses the paradigmatic nature of amulets and some marginal forms of communication.

Chapter 5 finally studies the paradigmatic nature of forms of nonverbal communication, gestures, of verbal communication, and of the use of amuletic tokens in detail. The various semiotic and behavioural options pursued in the use of amulets as tokens for communication are then in conclusion related to questions of communicative and cognitive style.

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3. C.D.F. MOSSE

Caste, Christianity and Hinduism: A Study of Social Organisation and Religion in Rural Ramnad. D.Phil. (D/74218/87)

Fieldwork in a mixed Hindu-Catholic village in Ramanathapuram (Ramnad) District of Tamil Nadu, south India, together with archival research, has involved investigation into three closely inter-related subjects: firstly, the nature of the regional social and religious institutions of Ramnad, and in particular the relation between caste and religion in the context of religious pluralism; secondly, the structure of a religiously plural multi-caste untouchable community, the changing position of the different untouchable castes within the village caste hierarchy, and their strategies for status striving - including the significance of alternative religious identities to this; thirdly, the manner in which Christianity, especially Roman Catholicism introduced into the area by Jesuit missionaries in the 17th and 18th centuries, has become embedded in the indigenous social and religious order of the region.

The regional model of caste identified, is one in which notions of service, rights and caste honour, rather than ritual purity and impurity, have a central place. Religious institutions, especially the annual festivals of Hindu deities and Catholic saints, have an important place in the articulation of this model of caste. In this connection the history of caste conflict at one Catholic shrine from the 1850s to the 1980s is examined in detail. The significance of this ritual context for the status striving of one untouchable caste in the village is analysed.

Although the conceptual model of caste is more Hocartian than Dumontian, complementarities such as the opposition of purity and impurity nonetheless provide the basic structure of the social order and the formal structure of life-crisis rituals. The organisation of the Hindu village pantheon and the Catholic cult of saints is also informed by a set of complementary relations between superior and inferior aspects of divinity.

The ethnographic material thus raises two overlapping issues. Firstly, what is the relationship between the structural form of society and the conceptual model interpreting local social relations for the actors themselves? What, also, is the relation between pan-Indian social categories, on the one hand, and regional and historically specific caste hierarchies, on the other? The second issue concerns the existence of structural continuities in the ordering of the social and religious world of Hindus and Christians in the village, and considers the relationship between the universal ideas and values of Christianity as a world religion, and the Indian social and cultural matrix in which it is rooted. A model which draws on the indigenous spatial categories of the 'village' and the 'forest' is proposed to account for both continuity and discontinuity in the relation of Christianity to Hindu society in Ramnad, and some fundamental changes in this relationship are observed.

4. H.M. RADLEY

Economic Marginalization and the Ethnic Consciousness of the Green Mong (Moob Ntsuab) of Northwestern Thailand. D.Phil. (D/74226/87)

In this thesis I describe the apparently incompatible changes between the ideologies of egalitarianism and hierarchy which characterizes Mong thought and action. The so-called oscillation between autocratic and democratic social philosophies has been widely observed among the hill peoples of Southeast Asia. I do not believe that it is possible to understand these social formations by constructing a-priori structural models. Most hill peoples are highly marginalized and their consciousness reflects this. It is to the history of Mong's social relations that we must look to gain an understanding of their ideology.

The thesis is divided into two sections, The World of Light and The World of Darkness. The division follows the Mong distinction between the material world of human beings and the metaphysical spirit world. In the first section I give a comprehensive account of Mong history and a description of the economies of three villages in Thailand. By examining the long history of contact with the Chinese state and the changing economic relations with the lowland world, I hope to establish the framework for the Mong's world vision. In the second section of the thesis I describe the Mong spirit world through ancestor ceremonies, the funeral epic, myths, and the rituals of shamanism. I suggest that the distinction between the communalism of the extended family, with its associated lineage ceremonies, and the individualism of the shaman, with his sorties into the hierarchical spirit world, provides the categories for the shifts between the desire for the egalitarianism of the lineage, and the desire for the hierarchy of kingship.

The two worlds of the Mong are complementary and, I will argue that at times of crisis, the concept of the spirit world is transformed from that of a metaphysical world into an extension of the lowland world and state. Messianic uprisings proclaiming a Mong kingdom should not be viewed as the aberrations of primitive peoples, but as the awakening of their understanding of exploitation based on ethnic and linguistic divisions, and a historical lack of territory. The shift from a retreat into the subsistence ethic of the lineage and extended peasant family, in which the Mong regard themselves as losers and a perennial minority, to the visions of a Mong kingdom have only occurred when Mong society has been dislocated by civil war and social turmoil. Finally, I will argue that ethnic identity is not something which can be viewed in isolation from the wider pattern of social relations, and I compare the ethnic consciousness of the Mong to the class consciousness of capitalist societies.

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5. Jonathan SPENCER

Tenna: Peasant, State and Nation in the Making of a Sinhalese Rural Community. D.Phil. (D/74241/87)

The thesis is an enquiry into the experience of social and economic change in a rural Sinhalese community in eastern Ratnapura District, Sabaragamuwa Province, Sri Lanka and is based on anthropological fieldwork and archival research carried out in Sri Lanka between 1981 and 1984. The first part describes changes in the local economy between 1815 and 1982; the second is a description of politics and religion in 1982; the third is an analysis of the moral effect of social change and the causes of rural politicization and Buddhist nationalism. Part One is largely historical and concerned with change in the material environment; after an introduction to the area, there are chapters on the colonial state and the local elite, and the growth of state involvement in the village economy. It is argued that the indigenous landed aristocracy was largely a colonial creation, but its wealth came from new resources like tea-estates and newly-irrigated paddy-fields; colonial policy did not create a landless rural proletariat in this area - rather investment in irrigation works meant that there was, until the 1950s, an excess of paddy land in a notoriously unhealthy district. Details of changes in land tenure and tenancy relations from the early nineteenth century until the 1980s are discussed. Since the eradication of malaria in the 1940s the population of the area has grown with an influx of informal migrant squatters who have benefited from easy access to former Crown land. The final chapter of the first part describes the ways in which the village now supports itself, and contrasts the social implications of new activities like gemming and cash-cropping with swidden and paddy-farming. The second part describes a cycle of Buddhist temple rituals, interpreted as a deliberate attempt to recreate a moral community using the idiom of contemporary Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism. This is contrasted with an account of the Presidential election of October 1982, and its divisive impact on the community. The third part starts with evidence on change in the moral values of everyday life; it is argued that there is a growing gap between public *politesse* and private fears, between the way people think the world is and the way they think it ought to be; at the same time assumptions about inequality and morality are shown to have undergone a considerable change in recent years. The conclusion assesses the high degree of politicization in Sri Lankan rural areas and the tenacious hold of nationalist ideology; it is argued that the two are interdependent, reflecting both the long history of state involvement in the local economy, and the cultural pressures induced by recent changes. In particular the appeal of nationalism is seen to reside in its capacity to subordinate otherwise incoherent events and the threatened chaos of rapid change to an encompassing narrative of national destiny.