

BOOK REVIEWS

Brenda Johnson Clay.

Pinikindu. 1977. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.
xviii. 173. £10.50.

Ethnographies of matrilineal groups who believe the substance of children to be derived solely from the father are somewhat rare. An ethnography of such a people in which no direct reference is made to this state of affairs must be unique. Pinikindu is an attempt to cast ethnography in a different mould, to escape from the restrictions imposed by traditional frameworks. It is introduced as 'an interpretative analysis of cultural symbolisations of the Mandak people' of New Ireland, focussing particularly on those symbols 'through which the Mandak define and articulate interpersonal and intergroup relationships' (1). Dr. Clay tries to describe Mandak society to us through its central cultural symbols, the shared understanding of which constitutes the reality of Mandak experience. The problems she tackles are those of the definition of social unit boundaries and the regulation of relations between them. Inevitably, this involves detailed consideration of kinship and reciprocity. Dr. Clay refuses, however, to treat matters in these terms and steadfastly pursues a course of obfuscation in which the reader is faced with a bewildering mass of Mandak terms, an exhaustive and exhausting account in which no reference is made to the work or even the terminology of other anthropologists.

The reason for this seems to lie in concern for the transmission to the reader of an unprejudiced impression of Mandak life. Dr. Clay assumes that the use of anthropological terminology would work against this. More particularly, kinship terms are rejected on the grounds that genealogical terms are not a valid translation of Mandak categories. The use of such bald terms as 'cross-cousin' or 'lineage' is studiously avoided, and Dr. Clay demonstrates instead how ideas of 'nurture' and 'substance' are linked with those of 'sharing' and 'exchanging' to define units and the relations between them. Her avoidance of kinship terms seems based on a confusion about their use. She worries that 'the Mandak themselves do not think in terms of genealogical frameworks' and that 'genealogical definitions of Mandak categories add little if anything to comprehension of their cultural signification' (43). It is evident that the Mandak do recognise categories of persons related to each other in definable ways, that these categories can be seen to conform to terms in general anthropological usage, and that they could usefully be labelled as such. As Needham has remarked, 'The circumstance that two societies can be described by the same means does not argue any significant similarity either sociologically or semantically, between them. Still less does it mean that the relationships in question are genealogical or that they are so conceived by the actors.' The use of kinship terms need not destroy the interpretation the ethnographer seeks to provide; their abandonment plunges the reader into an impossible dilemma, forced to use indigenous words without a knowledge of the language of which they are a part.

Dr. Clay's description of Mandak society is centred on a cluster of complex metaphors in terms of which social relationships are expressed. The focal symbol is that of 'nurture', which is associated with female, sharing, sustenance and the generalised reciprocity of the exogamous group. Female nurture is a long term process, a life-long obligation to sustain and support, in contrast to 'paternal

substance', associated with formal exchanges and the more balanced reciprocity existing between exogamous groups. This dichotomy is the fundamental category division of Mandak society, it embraces all social relations. The symbolisation of 'female nurture' as the metaphor of clan membership is one of the more arresting notions in the book, but it is divorced from any attempt to show what this image of selfless provider might mean to the women themselves. Dr. Clay's work was primarily with the men; women were too busy with their many tasks and, anyway, women were 'reticent in talking to strangers and not as adept as men in articulating their own culture'(xv).

There is much reiteration of the symbolic associations which Dr. Clay feels to be central to an appreciation of the Mandak world. Unfortunately the general circumvention of nearly all anthropological concepts places burdens on both author and reader throughout the book. So much of the text is taken up in precisely the sort of explication which the shorthand of terminology avoids. As a result, a sense of frustration assaults the reader. We are denied access to information which Dr. Clay evidently has in her possession, as question after question remains unanswered. New Ireland ethnography is sparse and it is a pity that an obviously sensitive fieldworker should have chosen to present potentially fascinating material in such an inaccessible manner.

Lynette Singer.

Jean Baker Miller, Towards a New Psychology of Women. Boston:Beacon. 1976. \$ 9.95.

The latest book by Dr. Miller, who is presently working at the Tavistock Clinic in London while on leave from Boston, Mass., is welcome for the constructive way she deals with potentially dispiriting material, finding 'strengths' where others find 'weaknesses' and offering hopeful solutions to seeming intractable problems in the way ahead. Her approach, while novel, is in tune with some anthropological work being attempted in England, and it is stimulating to find distinguished scholars in other fields making valuable analyses, informed with their different academic histories and specialist modes of discourse, on common problems. Throughout her admirably concise book Dr. Miller keys her theory to particular cases. She shows sympathy for all involved in them: there are no devils in her scenarios. She evaluates the different impact such ideas as 'service', 'power' and 'conflict' have had on the self-perceptions of women and men, and their interrelationships, and envisages possible new transformations. Unlike some past writings by psychologists, which sometimes seem to indulge in more incredible fantasies than those they so solemnly discuss, Dr. Miller's insights show that elusive 'common sense' which is a sure sign that they approach that 'authenticity' which she advocates.

Shirley Ardener.

Books Received

Morris Goodman and Richard E. Tashian (Eds.). Molecular Anthropology. 1976. New York and London: Plenum Press.