

REVIEW ARTICLE: THE DUTCH CONNECTION

P.E. de Josselin de Jong, Structural Anthropology in the Netherlands 1977. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff. 399pp. Guilders 75.

In discussing the practise of anthropology in the Netherlands from the closing years of the first decade of our century, we can begin with two of the earliest and most remarkable studies that exemplify significant trends of thought.

The first is the work of van Ossenbruggen, a curious character about whom we know little except his work on Indonesian customary law and classificatory systems and a monograph on primitive thought; he died a recluse in either France or Italy in 1950. Van Ossenbruggen's paper on 'monca-pat' (1918; repub. in P.E. de Josselin de Jong, ed, Structural Anthropology in the Netherlands 1977) demonstrated the importance of the insights of Durkheim and Mauss to the understanding of Indonesian institutions and customs. Here he emphasised relations between social phenomena rather than individual institutions and customs themselves, resulting in a treatment of the social world as being composed of discrete, coherent, and totalising classificatory systems. 'Monca-pat' was related to the Javanese division of their world into four territorial groupings, corresponding to the cardinal points of the compass. Villages were arranged to form a four-fold unity around a fifth village at the intersection of the N-S and E-W axes. Effectively there was a unity between five points and four directions which was taken to represent a basic structural pattern by which the totality of existence, imaginary and real, could be incorporated. 'In other words', wrote van Ossenbruggen, 'the cruciform division of the original division of tribal territory served also as the foundation for the primitive organisation of perception' (in P.E. de Josselin de Jong 1977: 50). Classification by four and five pervaded the whole of social organisation. Thus one-fifth of the acreage of the village would be entrusted to the headman while the remaining four-fifths were cultivated by the rural population. It was the common pattern underlying the mythological relations amongst the gods and demons of the Hindu-Javanese pantheon, and further, formed the basis of the system whereby time was divided and characterised (see Pigeaud in P.E. de Josselin de Jong 1977).

It might be observed that such an analysis of ethnographic data is not uncommon, but we should remember the date of van Ossenbruggen's publication. Furthermore, his paper heralds the beginning of a tradition of fieldwork which for the first time would test empirically the adequacy of the views of the French theorists. Van Ossenbruggen's paper also contained traces of an evolutionist (or 'transformational' to borrow Locher's term) bent, inherited from Wilken, which are elegantly developed in a different direction by Rassers, whom we shall now discuss.

No papers by Rassers are presented in Structural Anthropology in the Netherlands, and although his principal work Panji, The Culture Hero, A Structural Study of Religion in Java has been translated into English, it is at present unavailable. His approach exhibited his debt both to L'Année Sociologique and to van Ossenbruggen's practical demonstration of the method, but he made an original contribution in developing an historical dimension to his analysis.

Hazeu suggested that in the guise of the ostensibly Hindu shadow play, an original Javanese ritual was prospering. By subjecting the least markedly Hindu parts of shadow play repertoire to anthropological analysis, Rassers was able to reconstitute an older corpus of myth, influential on earlier Javanese literature and dramatic production. He demonstrated that such material was structured according to a dual system of symbolic classification; however, he was unable to find a corresponding duality in

social organisation which he assumed must be responsible for the generation of such a system, and so attempted to reconstitute the conjectural form of such a social organisation from the pre-Hindu past. Thus Rassers was interested not only in elucidating the underlying principles of a classificatory system, an interest common to all the papers in Structural Anthropology in the Netherlands and central to the Leiden approach; he attempted as well to apply this structural approach to the solution of historical/evolutionary problems.

Rassers is usually credited with introducing J.P.B. de Josselin de Jong to the work of L'Année Sociologique, and with the latter's election to a chair at Leiden in 1922 we mark the beginning of the structural tradition in the Netherlands. From these early years increasing attention was given to classificatory systems as they reveal the perceptual organisation that a people impose to order its world, and the field of study was widened to take into consideration Indonesian societies outside Java. The type of structural pattern van Ossenbruggen was able to discern in Java was studied as one possible variant of many which appeared to have characterised Indonesian societies in the past and to have left important traces in the present (see Onwlee and Jansen in P.E. de Josselin de Jong 1977). A recurrent similarity of these Indonesian societies appeared to be a kinship structure based on a moiety system constituted by two pairs of mutually crossing moieties, resulting in double descent; the same classificatory principle, furthermore, was thought to structure the religious order - a classically Durkheimian position which invested the social organisation with determinate power. Over and above this, it was also supposed that the logic underlying symbolic classificatory systems was governed by certain unconscious, structural principles which found their most elaborate expression in kinship relations. On this set of presuppositions van Wouden based his scholarly researches into Types of Social Structure in Eastern Indonesia (1935). By suggesting that any model is capable of implying diverse possibilities, other than those realised in empirical reality, van Wouden was able to isolate and account for the relations between a system of asymmetric, prescriptive alliance and matrilineal and patrilineal forms of social organisation. During the same year and under the same influences G.J. Held conducted a similar analysis of the social organisation underlying the Mahābhārata confirming some of van Wouden's theses.

Many similarities are evident between the work of the Leiden scholars and the later writings of Lévi-Strauss (although Lévi-Strauss makes no mention of their work in Les structures élémentaires de la parenté 1949). It may, indeed, be argued that the early exponents of Dutch anthropology, viz. van Ossenbruggen, Rassers, and van Wouden, had anticipated the course that French thought was to take. Leiden, of course, was being heavily influenced by the work of L'Année sociologique at the same time as Lévi-Strauss was himself a student of Mauss. Van Ossenbruggen's work on territorial classification in Java was directly influenced by Mauss's essay on primitive classification, and it in turn stimulated new studies in that idiom by Dutch scholars. It is not surprising, therefore, that the first appreciation and commentary on Lévi-Strauss' Les Structures élémentaires de la parenté was written by J.P.B. de Josselin de Jong (1952; repub. in P.E. de Josselin de Jong 1977). Apart from some critical comments on matters of detail regarding Lévi-Strauss' rendering of the Australian classificatory systems, he applauds the analysis.

These last criticisms of de Josselin de Jong to Lévi-Strauss tell us something else about the Leiden tradition: it was concerned with structuralism only in so far as the theory was of use in interpreting and explaining social reality. P.E. de Josselin de Jong has written that, whereas for Lévi-Strauss structuralism was a means of revealing the fundamental mechanisms of the human mind, the Leiden anthropologists sought only the description of an 'ordered-structured-universe'. The theoretical principles involved had been largely ignored, as had their methodological presuppositions. At any rate modern

Dutch writers show a greater interest in theoretical matters; see, for example, van Baal's Symbols for Communication, 1971, and Reciprocity and the Position of Women, 1975; also de Josselin de Jong and papers by J. Pouwer. P.E. de Josselin de Jong described Leiden anthropology thus:

The aim has always been a harmonious combination of empirical work in the field and thorough theoretical preparation for, and analysis of, this work (P.E. de Josselin de Jong 1960: 16).

Like the British tradition, Dutch anthropology went through a period of evolutionist thought, and it was only under the guidance of J.P.B. de Josselin de Jong that sociology in the contemporary sense was established. In discussing his enormous influence, van Baal notes that without being a prolific writer (much of his own fieldwork remains unpublished) he was able to raise the level of anthropological discussion by moving it away from the accumulation of ethnographic snippets towards a coherent, empirical enquiry into the structural orders of societies (van Baal 1965). De Josselin de Jong made an analogy between society and language which, together with the Durkheimian influence, led him to advocate a holistic attempt to uncover the fundamental structural configurations underlying a society. He writes, for example:

Man is no more conscious of the system as such, than he is of the grammatical construction of his language. But he applies the system nevertheless and is guided by it in all his activities, in a way similar to that in which he uses the system of his language and at the same time is controlled by it in his speech. (J.P.B. de Josselin de Jong in P.E. de Josselin de Jong 1977: 174).

It is not surprising that early Dutch anthropologists tended to concentrate their studies on Indonesia. They were mostly colonial administrators, missionaries, linguists, and jurists, who could indulge their interest in exotic cultures only during their spare time. Unlike so many others, however, their professions did not impair their scholarship and their pastime tended to improve colonial rule. With the end of the Second World War, Indonesia was soon to gain her independence; relations between the Netherlands and her former colony had seriously deteriorated, making it extremely difficult to continue ethnographic work there. This resulted in a re-orientation of studies which primarily focused attention on Irian Jaya. Under van Baal's governorship, anthropological research was enthusiastically encouraged and apart from his own scholarly work on the structure of Marind-Anim religion, numerous other monographs appeared dealing with many of the main ethnic groups (see Held 1957; Serpenti 1965 etc.). Some of the researchers addressed their work to particular problems (such as Pouwer and Schoarl) but there remained a substantial corpus of work on symbolic classification and some on religion (not only related to Irian Jaya; see van Zantwijk 1967 on the Tarascans, and van der Leeden 1975 on Australian aboriginal mythology).

A third period characterised by a further re-orientation of fieldwork was necessitated in the 1960s by the Indonesian colonisation of Irian Jaya and the expulsion of the Dutch. From that time Dutch anthropologists have widened their interests to include South and Middle America, Africa, and the Arctic lands, with an increasing number of undergraduate students carrying out fieldwork in rural communities in Europe. With the diversification of the field of research has come exploration into different methodological approaches, but despite P.E. de Josselin de Jong's opinion that the 'Leiden trend' has lost much of its peculiar character it is still possible to discern a distinct tradition in the Netherlands.

It is astonishing that, as far as I am aware, all the written histories of anthropological thought published in the English language have failed to note even the existence of Dutch anthropology. British and American students owe a great debt to the work of Rodney Needham, not only for introducing Leiden anthropology to an English-speaking audience, but for the translations

he has given us, beginning with Durkheim and Mauss on Primitive Classification and including such Dutch authors as Pouwer, Pott and van Wouden. This new collection of essays edited by de Josselin de Jong makes a stimulating addition to the growing availability in English of Dutch works already commissioned by Van Gorcum and the Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-Land-en Volkenkunde, and it attests to the esteem given them by their British colleagues.

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