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INDONESIA

METCALF, PETER. *A Borneo Journey into Death. Berawan Eschatology from its Rituals* (Symbol and Culture). Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982. Xxi+275 pp. Plates, maps, bibliography, index. Hardbound US \$23.00 ISBN 0-8122-7849-6

Borneo has been celebrated in ethnological literature for being the receptacle of peoples who are deeply concerned with death and the dead. The most notable of those are the Ngaju of southern Borneo with their impressively elaborate feast to be held at the end of the entire cycle of mortuary rituals. This feast, known as *tivah*, attracted the attention of the Westerners so enchantingly that, according to Miles (1965: 161), nearly one hundred descriptive accounts of it were published in the last century. Without doubt, the secondary treatment of the corpse essentially involved in the feast was the major focus of interest and of curiosity. Based upon and indeed stimulated by the accumulation of ethnographic data of Ngaju mortuary practices, Hertz (1907) propounded a theory of collective representation of death, now counted as a classic study especially since the appearance of its English translation in 1960.

Metcalf's book on Berawan mortuary rituals and eschatology presents a vivid description of a Borneo death scene and tries to set it in the scholarly framework inherited from Hertz. This is a praiseworthy enterprise, for, despite enthusiasm of anthropologists for Hertzian theory, there have been surprisingly few comprehensive empirical studies of what people act and think in the face of death. The present reviewer, himself having done field research on death practices among the Iban in Borneo (Uchibori, 1978), receives great stimulation from this book especially for comparative concerns.

The present-day Berawan live in longhouse communities along two branch rivers of the Baram River in northern Sarawak. Two communities have been converted to Christianity; one follows a revivalist cult called Bungan; and only one community preserves their traditional folk religion. Such a situation forces the researcher of old customs to rely on people's memory of the past for complementing what he observes among the contemporary members. The author's careful arrangement to distinguish what he heard from what he saw heightens the value of the book as an objectively written ethnography. Also, with regard to informants' exegeses, he often describes in detail the circumstances under which he gained information, sometimes with remarkable candour. This enables the reader to follow the author's experience during his research and, more importantly, to evaluate the exact status of a piece of information in the ethnographic reality which the book purports to convey.

The Berawan practise a form of secondary treatment of the corpse, termed *nulang* (from *tulang*: "bone"), though the majority of the dead receive simpler treatment which Metcalf calls the "abridged" funeral. This brings the Berawan case directly into link with the classic Nagju exemplar and with Hertzian analysis. In fact, at almost every critical point in the course of analysis of rituals, the author draws on Hertz's formulation about the nature of the temporal sequences inherent in this form

of burial. In this sense Metcalf's work just provides, as he claims, a suitable or, more precisely, affirmative test of Hertz's insight. It is regrettable, however, all the more for its fine presentation of ethnography, that the author seems neither to modify the great master's theory at any essential point nor to broaden the theoretical perspective by fully exploiting material from the Berawan. It was in 1964 that Tom Harrisson bewailed the dominance of the fifty-year old theory over the study of Borneo death. Should we repeat the same twenty years later? By saying this, I do not intend to doubt the validity of Hertzian theory applied to one level of collective representation. Rather, I believe it more fruitful in an ethnographic study such as this to pay deeper theoretical attention to the possible diversity in individuals' conceptions of—and reactions against—death. Fortunately, the author gives a number of seemingly idiosyncratic incidents in episodic forms. If the reader reads those parts with his own theoretical interest, this book will turn out to be a rich source for future research.

Metcalf takes a definitely ritualist approach to interpret the meanings of Berawan mortuary practices. Drawing upon Robertson Smith's thesis of the priority of ritual over theology or ideology, he denounces the Tylorian approach to primitive religion in general. This theoretical stance, it seems to the reviewer, is adopted because the present-day Berawan have very meagre mythology, let alone eschatological ideas. The situation is reflected well in the composition of the book, where only the last two short chapters (in the Part entitled *the Cosmology of the Ancestral Spirits*) deal with genuinely ideational aspects. Under such circumstances it seems to be an unavoidable alternative to take the ritualist rather than intellectualist stance and to seek "true hidden meaning" of rituals which is to be revealed only to the "analysts." This is a completely acceptable approach, but it should also be admitted that such analysis would gain more persuasive power if it would be systematically contrasted with natives' exegeses or manifest ideology. Without the latter, the symbolic analysis may seem to be too arbitrary, something like a castle built by an "analyst" in the air.

In any case, it should be kept in mind that the contemporary Berawan are a highly acculturated people with their traditional culture impoverished to a considerable degree. There is every possibility that they had a much more elaborate, if not entirely coherent, eschatology in the past. Certainly, even if it is the case, there might have been a gap between eschatological ideas and ritual practices. It is only in limited cases that the former explains the latter. However, the reverse is also true; eschatology, the Berawan eschatology if it exists or existed, cannot be constructed from the rituals without at least the exegeses on their constituent parts. Now what irritates the reviewer is this: Metcalf has done a fine analysis of Berawan mortuary rituals, but his symbolistic ritualist approach does not fully elucidate their eschatology. Admittedly, the (lost?) eschatology cannot be reconstructed by any means. But this does not immediately justify the general priority of rituals over ideology, either.

In this context, the position which Berawan death songs (*gu*) occupy in mortuary rituals is revealing. Those songs are to be sung exclusively on the occasion of *nulang* at one longhouse and on both initial funerals and *nulang* at another longhouse. Some of them describe the journey of the soul of the deceased to the land of the dead; some are sung for the health of living people; and some tell episodic stories somehow associated with death. The singing of death songs is considered to be an essential part of the respective mortuary rituals. Interestingly, the songs to be sung at one longhouse are in the language which "has fallen out of use in day-to-day affairs." It is the language of an ancient people now entirely integrated into the Berawan population. Consequently, the contents of those songs are hard to understand to the present-day Berawan.

This situation stands in sharp contrast with that of the Iban, among whom the

equivalent death songs, called *sabak*, are easily understood by average mature individuals. Iban *sabak* are filled with rich imagery of the land of the dead and mythological allusions, on which informants can make more or less thorough comments; they are, in other words, something like catalogues of Iban eschatology.

The fact that Berawan *gu* lack this cognitive function is a cause which leads the author of this book to disregard the importance of ideational eschatology other than that from the rituals. But this fact does not indicate that it was also the case in the past. There might have been a richer repertoire of *gu* which served exactly like Iban *sabak*. The reviewer could not but feel that what is treated in this book is the Berawan death rituals with their eschatology lost.

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LEEMANN, ALBERT und WERNER ROLL. *Lombok (Indonesien): Bevölkerungsstrukturierung gemäss Religion und Adat. Ein Beitrag zur Kenntnis soziokultureller Normen der Sasak und Balinesen* (Lombok: Stratification of the population according to religion and *adat*). Anthropogeographie, Band 1. Zürich: Geographisches Institut der Universität Zürich, 1983. 60 pp. Two maps, figures and tables. sFr. 20. (In German)

This book is based on research conducted on Indonesia's Lombok Island from 1979-1983. Professor A. Leemann, one of the coauthors, is already well known for his writings and his extensive field research in Bali.

Lombok is the immediate eastern neighbor of Bali. About 95 percent of its population of 1,957,000 is Sasak, a fact which creates the impression of a certain cultural homogeneity, although in point of fact this homogeneity does not exist. The population can actually be divided into a number of cultural categories, and it is this diversity of cultures that has fascinated researchers since C. J. Eerde, T. Nieuwenhuizen, and R. Gorris. It is no exaggeration to say that all of the studies of this island have treated this theme to at least some degree, and the present work is no exception.

The book aims at clarifying the characteristics of each of four such cultural categories found on Lombok, then to compare them with one another. A major premise of the book is that economic surveys and regional planning will not yield sufficient re-