

the pace of future studies of societies within the Pacific and particularly of the Indo-Fijians. Much of the historiography pertaining to this group still perpetuates a negative image of life on the plantations and implies tremendous social disruption. It is still a common assumption that certain individuals were responsible for this and political and economic dimensions are commonly not considered as they have been by Lal. The history of Indo-Fijians is indeed far richer and more complex than a history of merely passive victims. Lal has, however, only analysed their background and there are many subsequent aspects of Indo-Fijian history open for similar careful scrutiny and re-evaluation.

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*Counterpoint in Maori Culture.* By F. Allan Hanson and Louise Hanson. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1983, 232 pp. illus. Price: U.K. £17.50.

IN THESE days of structural histories, of praxis interacting with cultural reason, this book offers a promise but fails to deliver a totally satisfying response. The author's stated aim (p.8) is 'to describe the forms or templates which Maoris used to conceptualize history, be it the work of the gods as the world took shape, the doings of their ancestors as they colonized New Zealand, or the patterns of development which Maoris anticipated in cordial or hostile relationships among individuals and groups or between humans and the gods'. Using a rather idiosyncratic semiotic scheme wherein a syntagm is defined as the formal structure of a conventional sequence of elements, the authors claim at the outset that two basic syntagms or developmental sequences can encompass all of this 'history'.

The three chapters of Part One explore the syntagm of complementarity which operates by emphasizing the differences between entities as they unite, produce something new, then separate. The complementary structure of sexual union, whether of gods or men, provides the archetype for this syntagm, but many examples are presented of the way in which this pattern served as a template for a diversity of Maori ideas about human behaviour, from relations between parent and child to relations of mind and body. In the course of this explanation, the reader gains some valuable insights into the operation of the concept of *tapu* which is interpreted convincingly as simply being 'under the influence of *atua*' (p.50). Indeed, almost all relationships between the human and the divine are shown to follow the complementary syntagm.

The four chapters of Part Two deal with the other basic syntagm, that of symmetry, starting with the cordial reciprocity of gift-exchange between equals but moving quickly to conflict and the hostile exchanges of warfare. Apart from the conceptualization of human history, the pattern of symmetry followed by separation was also used extensively as a template for natural history, explaining the particular habits and habitats of plants and animals and the distribution of geographical features.

While accepting that these formulations of symmetrical and complementary

structures may help to make Maori life more comprehensible to the outside student, surely even the most ardent structuralist would shrink from the bland assertion that 'these structures helped to make Maori life intelligible to Maoris' (p.191).

These cultural templates are said to structure the processes of Maori life at several different dynamic levels, ranging from the recurrent predictable patterns of daily events to the more radical progressive changes of original settlement and the shaping of the present world. When disrupted relationships are not reconstituted and the altered conditions remain altered, Maori life enters 'the realm of history properly speaking' (p.193). However, this distinction between the recurrent forms of daily life and the non-repetitive directional processes of 'history properly speaking' is not worked out in detail. In fact, the sort of historical developments that the Hansons would include in their category of 'history properly speaking' such as the deployment of the sun and the moon, and the origin of the human food supply, are precisely those relationships that conventional historians would consign to the field of myth. For a nineteenth-century Maori, too, these relationships had an important replicative aspect, maintaining their relevance to the living in a continually renewed timeless present.

This book falls short of its promise because of a basic underlying contradiction. In order to reconstruct the syntagmatic structures of pre-contact Maori society from nineteenth-century documentary evidence, the authors are forced to begin with the assumption that 'many of the basic presuppositions and structures of indigenous Maori culture were still largely intact through the first half or more of the nineteenth century' (p.5). As a result of this assumption they run the danger of setting up a monolithic unchanging 'traditional Maori culture' at the very time when the latest fine-grained hermeneutic studies of neglected Maori sources are patiently demolishing this outdated construction. Consequently, within the terms of this assumption, the Hansons give no recognition to the way in which their 'history' was functioning as myth in nineteenth-century New Zealand society, nor to the developing co-existence of mythical and historical cognition in defining the identity of tribal groups. Their discussion of *tapu* might have been tempered by an awareness of the possibility that the special intensification of *tapu* in nineteenth-century New Zealand may have been a defensive mechanism to support a culture under threat. In short, their initial assumption precludes any consideration of the most exciting area of structural history, that is the study of the successive transformations of structure as 'the structure of the conjuncture' begins to generate its own logic.

If anthropology can only conceptualize historical structure by denying historical process, then this 'science' clearly has little to offer to the discipline of history. On the face of it, the Hansons' scheme leaves the historians of New Zealand's contact history with the pedestrian job of filling in the details. However, their book ends with a silent question that offers some reprieve. If 'the most radical sort of change that it is possible to articulate within the syntagmatic forms of Maori culture' (p.194) is limited to the creation of new beings from the union of previously existing entities, then how did Maori culture account for the arrival of Europeans? Why did not the culture collapse there and then?

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