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Review

Reviewed Work(s): Die australischen Terminusysteme by Johann Láng

Review by: Lorenz G. Löffler

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each other, seems to me to lead nowhere useful. There is no question here of muddling a social system with a terminological system. The Huli are cognatic. But what is important is that they do not merely happen to fall into existential patterns of agnation, but that they have an *idea* of agnation, and this idea, apparently distinct from ideas of agglutinating patrilineality, seems useful and good to them. The question, going beyond the more easily apprehended facts of generalized advantage into the objective, is "Why?"

It will be clear, I hope, that I think the greater opportunity has been missed for the time being. The book stands as a neat and professional model of how to go about presenting a fine piece of fieldwork. But I think it is a pity that Glasse did not add a few pages of his maturer reflections.

Die australischen Terminusysteme. JOHANN LÁNG. Budapest, 1968. 200 pp., diagrams. n.p. (paper).

Reviewed by LORENZ G. LÖFFLER
Freie Universität Berlin

The author elaborates an interpretation of the Australian kin term systems first proposed by him in 1960 (*Acta Ethnographica* 9, Budapest). Along with the extensionist view, he rejects the conventional approach that the function of these term systems is to formulate kinship relations. According to him, their kinship connotations are the result of a more basic function: to bring into evidence the various marriage regulations between a certain number of descent lines and certain generations. Undiscussed remains the implicit curiosity that people should choose to marry partners of a certain generation (of generally unknown genealogical origin?) instead of a certain suitable age. Of more relevance, however, than etiological myths produced in an anthropologist's workshop are the insights with which they might provide us. We know that some populations are rather careful in correlating kin terms and marriageability while others are not. Since the latter fact is not becoming to Láng's theory, he sets to work in order to adjust the ethnographical data: whatever term system he deals with, he can show, after having corrected his sources, that the

corrected facts prove the validity of his thesis. To be sure, Láng is honestly convinced that he is solving ethnographical puzzles. Nearly all of these puzzles, however, are the outgrowth of his preconceived ideas. The Marshall Islanders, e.g., who distinguish between elder and younger siblings including, by virtue of their "Hawaiian" cousin terms, cousins of all degrees, do allow cross-cousin marriage; according to Láng, however, they should not use the same term for marriageable and nonmarriageable cousins and thus either can marry any sibling or no relative at all, unless we decide that "younger sibling" is the term for members of Ego's generation in the marriage partner descent line (including the cross-cousins), while "elder sibling" denotes the tabooed own descent line generation "siblings."

This example brings to the fore the basic theme of the whole book: "younger" and "elder" sibling (brother or sister) are mistranslations for "same generation members of either own or allied descent line"; they serve, in the Australian systems, especially to distinguish the same generation members of the two halves of one's own moiety. This idea may, I should say, prove fruitful in a limited number of cases, and we should be ready not only to acknowledge our debt to Láng if we manage to dissolve a terminological puzzle by its application, but also to pay more attention to this question in further research. In this way, Láng's idea will be useful, even though the very way in which he tries to convince the reader of its applicability must have the reverse effect, viz., to regard all this as mere humbug.

Láng, I am sorry to state, not only omits to produce the internal evidence for his conclusions (still, it may be my failure to perceive it), but he even misreads his sources. Let me cite one example: He quotes (p. 8) McConnel (1933, disregarding her publications of 1940) to the effect that, with the Wikmunkan, "mother's younger brother" marries "father's elder sister." This is what should result from Láng's theory; there is, however, nothing in all of McConnel's publications to prove this. (On the contrary, she clearly states that the person in question is "father's younger sister.") The quoted passage refers to a list of kin terms, showing but one term for "father's elder and younger

sister." A minor slip? But it is placed in a context where it provides (or would be able to provide) the only conclusive evidence for Láng's thesis that there should be something wrong with hitherto accepted interpretation! And Láng has more of these slips: on p. 87 he states that according to McConnel *pola* is used for "father's father's sister's husband"; McConnel has but "mother's father's sister's husband." On p. 84 he gives *muka* 'mother's elder sister' (McConnel 1933), *katha* 'mother's elder sister' (McConnel: 'mother's younger sister') and changes this on p. 88, without comment, into *muka* 'mother's younger sister,' *katha* 'mother's elder sister.' Obvious errors? For *mukaya* (p. 85) he gives 'younger sister's son, son's wife,' while McConnel has 'younger sister's child, son's wife.' A minor omission? According to Láng's interpretation, "son's wife" is not "younger sister's daughter," but "elder sister's daughter"! Thus what at first glance might seem careless slips finally turn out to be systematic and wilful manipulations of ethnographic data. And when Láng finally states that his interpretations come completely ("in allem") up to the definitions given by McConnel, one cannot but wonder who, he believes, shall believe him?

To be convinced of the validity of one's theory is one thing, to prove it, another. Láng's strong conviction is demonstrated by the fact that he even corrects terminologies that, like that of the Aranda, are rather well documented by means of genealogies. In order to impart this conviction to his colleagues, however, Láng should, first of all, correct his methods.

Peoples and Cultures of the Pacific: An Anthropological Reader. ANDREW P. VAYDA, ed. Garden City, New York: The Natural History Press (published for the American Museum of Natural History), 1968. xvi + 557 pp., figures, maps, tables, bibliography, index. \$7.95 (cloth).

Reviewed by ROLAND W. FORCE
Bernice P. Bishop Museum

The twenty-six contributions that comprise this reader are unabridged and were selected to show something of the distinctiveness of Oceania or its parts (in cultural processes, environmental influences, social institutions, religious concepts, or cultural

values); to illustrate some of the main research interests of Pacific scholars (historical reconstruction, covariation of traits, or the holistic study of small societies); and to provide information of a more general sort that could serve as an introduction to more specialized studies.

Following a brief introductory essay by the editor, the book is divided into two parts. Part I is general and is made up of eleven contributions, two of which are brief notes and one of which is new. The others appeared originally from 1955 to 1967—seven in journals. Articles on geography, physical anthropology, culture history, ecology, and social organization are drawn from the writings of Thomas, Simmons, Swindler, Murdock, Ferdon, Barrau, Goodenough, Frake, and Sahlins. The new article by Grace on the classification of Pacific languages is a brief but excellent survey that should be particularly valuable to students.

Part II is devoted to areal studies and is nearly twice as long as Part I. Fifteen contributions are contained, one of which, "The Ethnology of Micronesia" by Mason, is new. Subsections on each of the three culture areas of the Pacific contain five articles apiece. There are several classics—without which one can scarcely conceive an introductory reader; Firth on Tikopia, Mead on Samoa, Malinowski on *Kula*. The papers were published originally over the years from 1920 (Malinowski) to 1967, but the majority have appeared since 1957. Firth, Mason, and Paula Brown each have two articles in the collection. Fischer has a brief note on the folktale in Truk and Ponape, Schneider discusses abortion and depopulation in Yap, Zegwaard tells of headhunting in West Irian, and Vayda follows Burrows' familiar "Culture Areas in Polynesia" with an essay on cultural distributions in Polynesia.

In varying degrees, the contributions in this section deal with social change, war, political organization, land tenure, folklore, economics, social organization, and demography. The approach is as broad as Mason's Micronesian ethnology or his atoll authority and economic process article and as highly localized and specific as Lessa's paper on the effects of a 1960 typhoon on a single atoll.