



Review: [Untitled]

Reviewed Work(s):

Teso in Transition: The Political Economy of Peasant and Class in East Africa. by Joan Vincent

Ivan Karp

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perhaps *Equality* in the title and not *Inequality* would place the emphasis more in the right direction.

In the remaining chapter Jack Golson argues, on the basis of archaeological evidence, for the existence in the Highlands of marked hierarchical societies in prehistoric times. Stung by criticism that his previous convincing ecologically and demographically founded explanations of agricultural evolution in the Highlands attribute too passive a role to human-beings, he speculates on concurrent social and political changes. He maintains that the six phases of agricultural development discernible in the archaeological record, which he lucidly summarises, correlate with the rise and fall of hierarchical politics. Briefly, when the population became too large to make simple swiddening practicable, those with access to fertile swampland, which they could drain, gained an advantage over others in rearing valuable pigs. When sweet potato arrived and all could support the same numbers of pigs, the established rich and powerful families switched the system to pearl shells which in turn were devalued with the arrival of Europeans and abundant supplies of sea-shells. With the evidence currently available, as the author acknowledges, such an argument is largely conjectural, although a more critical use of available ethnographic material would give any attempt needed credibility. To take at face value the writing of German missionaries just before the second world war, without judicious reference to the very sophisticated and detailed subsequent work carried out by others in the same region, is to invite distortion.

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VINCENT, JOAN. *Teso in transition: the political economy of peasant and class in east Africa*. x, 307 pp., maps, tables, bibliogr. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1982. \$28.50

Vincent's ambition is nothing less than to reproduce the achievements of English Marxist social history in an African context. Her orientation is derived from the works of E. P. Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm. Her analysis of the same relationships that are examined by these authors is the strength of this study at the same time as a too literal application of the context of English social history to a Ugandan setting is its greatest weakness.

Vincent describes the effects of political and economic incorporation of the Iteso into the Uganda Protectorate. She focuses on the consequences of Baganda imperialism, the development of local administration, the introduction of cash crops, and changing patterns of labour mobilisation and utilisation during the colonial period. Two important contributions of this

book are Vincent's documentation of the rise of a class of salaried administrators and clerical personnel, and her demonstration that peasants were created by the appropriation of labour power achieved through the introduction of cash crops and taxes.

Vincent's story takes her from the ethnic situation on the eve of colonial conquest through the establishment of an effective colonial administration by Baganda agents, their replacement by local administrators, the introduction of missionary and colonial administrators and the development of a peasant economy. Vincent is at her best when dealing with the manner in which external events impinged on the local economy and political organisation. She uses archival sources well and illustrates the continuing relevance of such neglected anti-colonial writers as Leonard Woolf.

This work is at its weakest where one might expect strength, however. The account of the precolonial economy and polity is inadequate. There is little sense of the variation in social organisation that is so characteristic of this area. The account provided of changing economy and social organisation neglects both persistence of social forms and the changes that must have occurred in production systems and the developmental cycle of domestic groups. These difficulties are the product of the almost total reliance of the author on archival sources. In spite of her claim to be doing social history leavened by fieldwork, there are few results of fieldwork contained in the study. There is little on the effect of economic and political change on marriage, household formation, on patterns of recruitment based on kinship and descent. There is virtually no oral testimony by participants in the events she describes.

An unfortunate byproduct of the gaps in this study is Vincent's reliance on formal propositions about patterns of change. When discussing local level changes she tends to demonstrate by appeal to authority rather than through appeal to evidence. An example is her reliance on Goody's assertion that the introduction of plough agriculture leads to an increase in monogamy. Surely there are other factors that will affect such trends. In any case there is plenty of evidence to show that the production system, land tenure and myriad other factors will affect such patterns. In some parts of western Kenya, for example, polygyny has increased among those segments of the population who most rely on plough agriculture.

The problem may go beyond the absence of certain kinds of data. Vincent advocates a variety of what she calls 'process theory' that fails to take account of local conditions and idioms in the production of either structure or action. Her interest lies in the discovery of parallels and not the exhibition of differences. Throughout references are made to processes which are

decontextualised; comparisons are easily drawn between the development of the peasantry in Africa and Brazil, for example. Local conditions are filtered out by the lens of a formal theory whose end product, interesting as it is, lacks both local history and ethnography.

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General

RAY, DOROTHY JEAN. *Aleut and Eskimo art: tradition and innovation in south Alaska*. 251 pp., illus., bibliogr. London: C. Hurst, 1981. £19.50

Following on her earlier examination of northern Alaskan Eskimo artistic traditions (*Eskimo art: tradition and innovation in north Alaska, 1977*) Ray focuses on southern Alaskan Eskimo from Unalakleet south. Yupik, Aleut and Pacific Eskimo art of the last two centuries is examined and compared and discussions of art forms place them in ethnographic and historic contexts. This excellent study provides quality photographs with detailed descriptions of over 200 objects and historic drawings of objects not readily available today. Anthropologists interested in material culture and the effects of contact on it should find the work valuable. It contributes substantially to the growing body of literature on non-Western art.

Ray stresses retention of traditional art forms by the Yupik (and northern Eskimos), who experienced insignificant contacts until after 1820, in contrast to the break from tradition and imitation of European forms by Aleut and Pacific Eskimo, who faced more intensive, lengthy Russian contact beginning in the late eighteenth century. By the twentieth century, northern Eskimos made traditional ivory and fur objects to sell to Westerners; Pacific Eskimos, having abandoned their traditions by the early nineteenth century, made European-style objects for their own use and produced souvenirs.

Ray details traditional art and the changes which material culture have undergone. Ivory amulet sculptures, some of which show animal skeletal lines, are reminiscent of prehistoric Inuit art. The very important mask tradition is examined; now it is defunct except for a few masks made for sale by retired men. Exquisite Aleut conical wooden hunting hats which were symbols of rank have also disappeared. Considerable attention is paid to basketry. In the nineteenth century, Aleuts made very fine baskets which Ray contrasts with less well-made Yupik ones. Aleut work declined in the 1930's while Yupik baskets have steadily improved in response to educational programmes. Storyknives, skin sewing and representational paintings are also studied.

Modern artistic expression, particularly since 1930, seems most notable among Yupik. Some villages developed characteristic styles for marketable objects such as the 'Nunivak tusk'. The intertwined animals carved into an ivory tusk remind one of Asian tusk carvings. Generally, Ray finds contemporary southern Alaskan ivory carving unimportant especially when compared to the large north Alaskan ivory tradition.

She acknowledges some accomplished artists working in European media, but again contrasts the Aleuts, lacking artistic continuity with their past, with the northern Eskimo artists developing in an uninterrupted artistic tradition. If Aleut and Pacific Eskimo artists succeed, in my opinion it will be through developing their identity as artists, not through attempting to reconstruct defunct traditions gearing them to souvenir markets.

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TOFFIN, GÉRARD (ed). *L'homme et la maison en Himalaya: écologie du Népal* (Cah. Nép.). 284 pp., illus. Paris: Éditions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1981. F. 95.00

The southern flank of the Himalayas is a complex ecological zone inhabited by a variety of 'tribes' and 'castes' of both Tibetan and Indo-aryan origin. *L'homme et la maison* brings together thirteen essays on the households of these different peoples, ranging from the Tharu in the humid Tarai lowlands and the Limbu, Newar, Majhi, Sherba pastoralists, and Indo-Nepalese Parbatiyas of the middle hills to the Thakali and Tibetans in the high Himalayas and the arid Tibetan plateau. All this is abundantly illustrated with more than two hundred photographs and line drawings of temples, palaces, houses, bivouacs and tents.

Of particular interest for social anthropologists are the contributions of Gaborieau, Bouillier, Toffin *et al.* and Sagant. Gaborieau details the construction of a Parbatya house in central Nepal and relates the social use of particular rooms to the ritual boundaries within the house; and Bouillier describes a typical house of the Sannyasi caste in east central Nepal, focusing especially on the ritual acts and domestic tasks performed in and around the house. Toffin, together with three architects, describes the house of the Poda, a Newar caste of untouchable fishermen-sweepers, and compares its modest structure with the houses of high-caste Newars. The Poda house comprises merely a front veranda and a backroom, thereby obliging the family to live an exterior life, whereas the more elaborate and multi-storied house of the high caste Newars permits an interior life and the spatial representation of the hierarchy of values. Finally Sagant recounts the Nahangma dom-