Book Reviews

Social Restriction

Tradition and Contract. The Problem of Order. ELIZABETH COLSON. Aldine, Chicago, 1974. xiv, 142 pp. $6.95. Lewis Henry Morgan Lectures, 1973.

There are a few romantics who believe that people can manage to live together without restricting each other's freedom and that this happy, unfettered state will come about if they eliminate all formal rules and offices. In recent years, as Elizabeth Colson notes early in *Tradition and Contract: The Problem of Order*, there has been a flourishing (which is probably abating now) of communes and other utopian communities where everyone is to be free to "do his own thing." In fact, of course, these utopian experiments are possible only because they take place within the framework of a wider society that protects the utopians from those around them and, in the last resort, from each other. Moreover, such of these communities as have survived have evolved restrictions, informal though they sometimes are, that protect group members from one another by limiting each person's freedom of action in a variety of ways. As Colson demonstrates from the ethnographic record, the issue is not whether people will have their freedom limited but how that limitation will be accomplished.

The title of the book suggests the two broad means by which order is maintained: impersonal authority as embodied in codified and formal law (the sort of control that is based on what once was thought of as a "social contract") and the force of group consensus (based on a shared "tradition"). At a minimum readers will have experienced impersonal authority in the form of bureaucratic rules, traffic regulations, and the pooh-bahs who sometimes administer them. These experiences make it easy to sympathize with those who flee to communes. Fewer will be keenly aware of the restrictions and difficulties found in groups where order stems mainly from tight-knit social networks, although those who have spent time in small towns will have some idea of what this involves. Colson provides a vivid and informative view of life in groups that are ordered mainly through the informal operation of everyday social relations. In considerable part this view derives from her more than 30 years of field research with North American Indians and with peoples in what is now Zambia. In none of the groups she studied were there formal positions of authority, established councils, or codified and enforceable law before these things were imposed by outsiders.

The coming of outsiders and their establishment of formal means of control is by no means seen by those affected as an unmixed bane. The people of the two different Tonga groups in Zambia with whom Colson has worked speak of the precolonial period when villages raided one another in times of hunger and when there were revenge attacks in which some people died and others were captured and enslaved. They speak of the dangers in those earlier days of going outside the network of individuals with whom one had close ties, there having been no dependable protection against strangers who would harm or enslave one. These accounts may not be wholly accurate, as Colson wisely stresses, for there is no evidence of what went on then other than what the people involved remember and report. What is true is that the people who make these reports believe them and that they welcome the coming of an "Administration," once colonial and now Zambian but still distant and powerful, that provides security in dealings with "strangers."

The Administration, however, has no representatives in most neighborhoods, and there, too, people need to be protected from one another's anger, envy, lust, and vengeance. This protection comes from personal restraint and from the informal controls relatives and friends exert on those who are party to conflicts. People counsel restraint when those close to them enter into conflict and they avoid taking sides whenever possible, since their relations with both parties are likely to be close and important across a wide spectrum of life's activities. These informal restraints do not always work, of course, and between any two members of a small community—and between any two families—there is a residuum of antagonism stemming from earlier conflicts. This residuum makes it all the more important for those who live in these communities to exercise self-control lest some small difference flare into a major quarrel. This self-control is aided by the belief, and Colson presents evidence to indicate that it is one widely present in communities that do not have the offices and formal procedures of central government, that people are in general much given to violence and destruction. Paradoxically, the belief in common and ready violence helps check violence. As Colson puts it, "It should . . . be no surprise to us if some people live in what appears to be a Rousseauian paradise because they take a Hobbesian view of the situation."

Some anthropologists do not accept Colson's view that order in communities without centralized government comes from self-restraint and broad interpersonal ties. Some argue that conflicts do not arise if people have few possessions, live in much the same way, and differ little in prestige. Others see the absence of conflict as rooted mainly in people's recognition of the advantages that come to them if they behave well enough to ensure that their fellows will cooperate with them. Colson rejects both of these views for the very sound reason that they are contrary to the experience of the people who actually live in societies without centralized power. She points out that even when possessions are few and unimpressive to outsiders they are still coveted and that even where differences in life-style are very small they engender envy and hatred. Similarly, although people do avoid conflict in order to gain the advantages that come from cooperation, they also fear the consequences of strife, and in the people's own understanding of what they are doing fear plays a very real part. To the extent that people welcome the imposition of external authority in societies that have little or none of their

own, it is because of the freedom this authority brings, and to a considerable extent this freedom is a freedom from fear.

However, Colson is as compelling in explaining the reservations people have regarding the rise of centralized authority and what accompanies it as she is in her discussion of why it is welcomed. She views the very general rise of what is often called "tribalism" (and that includes the increase in ethnically based politics in the United States) as closely related to the growth of states and the intrusion of their officials into provinces of life which were formerly understood as being subject only to individual control. As centralized authority grows and becomes more pervasive, people find more and more of what happens to them determined by decisions made in offices and councils where they themselves cannot be present to try to ensure the consideration they believe they deserve. Their only recourse is to representatives with whom they can identify, with spokesmen who are "like them" and who understand their special problems and desires. Since the beginnings of widespread urbanization in Africa and elsewhere, townsmen have divided the otherwise confusing mass of humanity around them according to a few easily learned and applied ethnic categories. By supporting politicians and other officials on the basis of their being in one's own ethnic category, one can hope to achieve the consideration and treatment one desires from the central authorities and thereby limit the baneful consequences of their decisions. Intellectuals and politicians may oppose "tribalism," but for ordinary people it is an attractive means by which to protect themselves from the excesses of central authorities.

Colson's slim volume provides an unbiased and well-supported view of the problem of order in modern societies. It is one of those rare books that can profitably be read by both specialists and laymen. Its businesslike prose and refreshing freedom from jargon make its powerful arguments and interesting data easily accessible. It is a pity it could not have been proofread more carefully, since there are a plethora of typographical errors to mar an otherwise wholly praiseworthy effort.

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Material Culture

The Human Mirror. Material and Spatial Images of Man. MILES RICHARDSON, Ed. Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge, 1974. xxiv, 366 pp., illus. $15.

The Human Mirror is a rather self-conscious, almost defensive demonstration that studies of material culture are still alive and kicking, or reflecting, and that such descriptions of artifacts, techniques, and settlement patterns not only constitute the basis for traditional archeological inference and historical reconstruction, but also provide the framework for approaching more recent behavioral concerns in cultural ecology, culture change, and persistence.

To prove the point, Richardson assembled a wide variety of studies: a biography of an expert Kwakiutl wood carver, a verbal description of Teotihuacan mural paintings, an inventory of clocks, radios, and bicycles among rural Bugandans, and a description of different techniques of Timbira hammock weaving. But the major themes of this disparate collection are settlement patterns, techniques of archeological reconstruction, and cultural ecology.

Continuing interest in archeological deduction is seen in "The material expression of Neanderthal child care" by Rowlett and Schneider; in Augustus Sordinas's excellent reconstruction of a "monstrous" olive press on the Island of Corfu, Greece; and in George Carter's "Domesticates as artifacts." Readers will find themselves silently arguing with these authors and their interpretations. For example, there is enough controversy about the plant and animal similarities found in the New World and Asia to keep academicians busy for years.

Changing patterns of settlement and architecture are approached historically by Donald Brown, who observed among the Picuris how with increased secularization the dispersed summer field houses were abandoned and the old integrative structure associated with the cacique was replaced with a modern cement-block community center. Similarly, the cultural geographers Kniffen and Newton document the changes in villages, in community life, and in architecture in their state of Louisiana. All these authors employ the unfortunate distinction between physical form and nonmaterial culture; all are historical in approach, and all see the natural environment as a constant. Each study is aimed toward a better understanding of local history, but the more general scientific theory awaits to be developed by someone else.

More clearly problem-centered are the two cultural-ecological studies by Thomas Schorr and Pearl Katz. Katz recounts her observations of how the people of Taos adapted to situations of crowding. They avoided involvement in the affairs of others, they maintained personal privacy, and they took frequent trips away. Schorr, however, has noted an omnipresent and institutional aggression in the behavior, the architecture, and settlement patterns of people living in the Cauca Valley of Colombia. Roughly put, it seems that the natural environment had something to do with scarcity of food and sex; competition and aggression became functional and for that reason were perpetuated from generation to generation.

Physically, *The Human Mirror* is done well: it is amply illustrated, is arranged in sections and subchapters, and includes an abstract for each article. Even though there is little theoretical underpinning to justify the assemblage and the metaphorical use of "mirror" and "reflection" is overdone, I am pleased to have such studies easily found together and readily available for comparison.

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The Experience of Odor

Human Responses to Environmental Odors. AMOS TURK, JAMES W. JOHNSTON, JR., and DAVID G. MOULTON, Eds. Academic Press, New York, 1974. xii, 346 pp., illus. $19.50.

The unifying theme of the disparate contributions to this book is the subjective experience of odor. Techniques are devised to measure this type of psychological experience in a variety of ways, and the goals of the research range from theoretical to highly applied. The methods range from instrumental through psychophysical to public opinion sampling, with some ingenious combinations, but always with the endeavor to relate odorant properties to some aspect of odor experience. One is likely to gain the unfortunate impression that odor is bad, although the psychologists emphasize the importance of the hedonic aspect of olfaction. Ab-