

this historical moment and the present-day American health care system: its ambivalence in dealing with the chronically ill; its resistance to financing community-based care; its commitment to institutionalization; and the continuing use of fear as a public health method, a dangerous tactic that can turn victims of disease into objects of vilification. Her deft integration of letters, hospital and medical reports, newspaper accounts, and census material as well as her sensitivity to health policy debates makes this a work of exemplary richness and sophistication. At times, the broader arguments are obscured by the barrage of

individual stories. But Bates compellingly shows that for historians and policy-makers to understand the development and problems of America's health care system, we need to listen to the voices of individuals who work in and turn to it. White Haven closed in 1956 and is today a restaurant, although Bates claims that visitors can still hear the ghostly voices of doctors, nurses, and patients. Certainly this work will remind us to listen ever closely.

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The Generation of Culture

Balinese Worlds. FREDRIK BARTH. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL, 1993. x, 370 pp., illus. \$55 or £43.95; paper, \$19.95 or £15.95.



ince its beginnings early in this century, American anthropology has encompassed two conflicting, if ideally complementary, ways of thinking about human culture and society.

One approach emphasizes the variation and change that characterize most social lives, the other the patterns culture sets for those lives. This analytical tension—process and variation versus pattern and replication—developed from debates in late-19th-century German philosophy of science and marked the career of American anthropology's founder, Franz Boas. Ever since Boas, the anthropology of nearly any topic—religion, economy, cognition—has had its advocates of process and its advocates of pattern.

Bali has been a classic site for studies of the pattern sort. From Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson to Clifford Geertz, anthropologists have analyzed Balinese politics, art, marriage, and even irrigation systems as stemming from a single set of cultural ideas marked by a heightened attention to form—"aestheticism." Fredrik Barth disagrees, not just with the prevailing wisdom about Bali, but with the whole idea of culture as a shared, coherent map of the world. Instead of pattern, he urges anthropologists to choose process, to study cultures as highly variable sets of

ideas and institutions that are generated out of people's everyday concerns and choices. His book offers a fresh way to view Bali and to rethink the comparative analysis of society and culture.

Barth brings to his Bali studies a lifetime of work on ecology, social organization, and ritual in more societies than nearly any other anthropologist can claim. His previous work in the Arabic world gave him easy entrée into a Muslim village in North Bali, an unusual perch from which to view largely Hindu Bali. Barth's initial concern is to unsettle our Bali images by showing Bali to be fraught with diversity: Muslim villages alongside Hindu ones; Hindu villages with no caste structure or no Brahmins; the famed fine-tuned Bali irrigation systems diverging into a panoply of resource bases (irrigation, dry farming, trade). Not only does North Bali look rather different from the more thickly studied South Bali, but each village provides a markedly different configuration of social institutions.

How are we to understand this variation? Barth's aim is not to provide an empirical explanation of the observed contrasts (although he suggests some intriguing historical sources of divergence); it is to ask what kind of model would be needed for such an explanation. He rejects the culture-as-template model because it cannot account theoretically for variation. If culture is a set of ideas and institutions and these vary significantly from place to place, that theory could say either that each place has its own culture (the general tendency of New Guinea studies, for instance), or (if, as in Bali, overarching religious and political ideas promise unity) that the culture has an ideal form, exemplified by some places, from which other places deviate.



"Inman of Pagatepan, praying by a fresh grave." [From *Balinese Worlds*]



"Prayers and blessing in the pura dalem: virgin girls ('angels') assisting in anointing the worshipers with sacred rice and holy water." [From *Balinese Worlds*]

Barth offers instead a model with two major components. The first is a concept of culture as a wide array of key ideas, stemming from distinct knowledge traditions rather than a simple template, integrated more or less tightly—not through logical coherence but through the social organization of knowledge. For Barth, it is the distinctive distribution of knowledge (and its reproduction) among elites and others that determines the degree of con-



"Rangda the witch, Queen of the sorcerers."
[From *Balinese Worlds*]



"Cremation tower arriving at the cremation grounds. The family pemangku, riding his father's tower, is fainting from the excitement."
[From *Balinese Worlds*]

vergence of people's ideas. Thus, the accepted hierarchy of texts and text-experts in the Muslim village yields a greater degree of convergence of ideas than does the decentralized array of texts and experts in the Hindu village. From each such tradition, actors and groups with differing interests and experiences select suitable bits of society and culture for themselves.

This component by itself suggests small groups (or individuals) spinning farther and farther away from each other, whereas we do, through it all, see a great deal of continuity in Balinese life. How does this happen? The question is an old one—with it Talcott Parsons began his norm-minded reshaping of American social science in the late 1930s. Barth's answer is different: in the living of their everyday lives, people develop some general, and widely shared, concerns. By "concerns" Barth means the precepts that Balinese carry through life, such as fearing error, managing one's feelings, and remaining humble. (Barth's approach resembles that of Pierre Bourdieu in this respect.) Concerns lead people to act in ways that are erroneously viewed by pattern-minded anthropologists as "culture." For example, fearing error leads people to act gaily so as to cover up nervousness in social encounters; observers have misinterpreted this gaiety as all there is to Balinese emotions and personhood, rather than as a cover for strong below-surface emotions.

This view of human action and culture provides the base for Barth to reconstruct long-standing ideas of what Balinese are like. Successive chapters offer new interpretations of politics, kingship, caste, and sorcery, each based on an analysis of social interactions and key Balinese concerns. Political life, once interpreted in terms of a stipulated harmony among village institutions, is now seen as rife with a factionalism born of concerns for self-protection; caste, generally viewed in pan-Indic religious terms, is seen as functionally linked to kingship. Several enjoyable cases illuminate Barth's view. The story of an elopement and marriage underscores how people construct diverging interpretations of events, but also how they hook those interpretations to a set of shared starting points: Islamic law, the concept of a vow, ideas about eloping.

These constant points of reference keep divergent interpretations from spinning out of control, but they also call into question the terms of Barth's frontal attack on past Bali studies. The "concerns" that begin his explanatory sequence themselves rest on shared beliefs, as his own data inform us. The concern to keep negative feelings under strict control, for example, stems from the belief, apparently shared by all Balinese, that letting such feelings rule make one susceptible to sorcery. Shared beliefs must, therefore, be basic to explanations of social life, not epiphenomenal. That said, one can still accept both the empirical critique of Bali-studies assumptions and the view, strongly supported here through case studies and brief discrip-

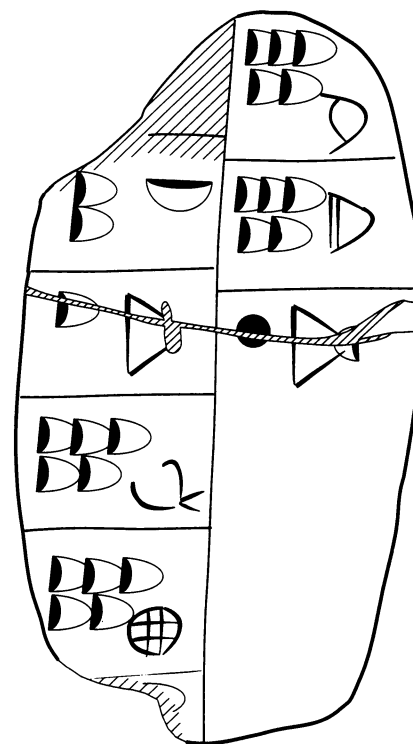
tions of a number of villages, that Balinese create diversity as much as they reproduce traditions.

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Early Literacy

Archaic Bookkeeping. Early Writing and Techniques of Economic Administration in the Ancient Near East. HANS J. NISSEN, PETER DAMEROW, and ROBERT K. ENGLUND. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1994. xii, 169 pp., illus. \$34.95 or £27.95. Translated from the German edition (1990) by Paul Larsen.

Writing in his immensely popular *Nineveh and Its Remains*, first published in 1849, Sir Henry Austin Layard, archeologist, adventurer, and diplomat, remarked: "With regard to the relative antiquity of the several forms of cuneiform writing, it may be asserted, with some degree of confidence, that the most ancient hitherto discovered is the Assyrian." Layard could not imagine that this script could be any older than the first millennium B.C. His own successes, including his discovery of



"Tablet with nine entries: from one to ten units of different grain products." [From *Archaic Bookkeeping*]