

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

JACQUELINE SOLWAY (Ed.) *The Politics of Egalitarianism: Theory and Practice*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2006, 260 p., index.

The Politics of Egalitarianism: Theory and Practice was published in the series *Methodology and History in Anthropology*. The volume is a festschrift devoted to the highly inspirational Canadian anthropologist Richard Borshay Lee. His anthropological approach is deeply humanistic and focuses on redressing oppression and inequality as well as on social and cultural change, and the influence of colonialism and neo-liberalism on local cultures. The book is divided into three subject sections, one of which is entirely devoted to the work of Lee. The remaining sections address the theoretical and practical aspects of the egalitarianism debate. This debate is generally investigated with reference to the life of the San, the foraging inhabitants of the Kalahari.

A tribute to Lee's versatile style of work is provided by Jacqueline Solway and Christine Ward Gailey through photographs, an intellectual biography of Lee, and personal memories supplemented by a bibliography. In the earliest works (the late 1960s until about 1975) Lee focused on cultural ecology, social evolution, and the cultural aspects of productive processes within the context of foraging societies. In the late 1970s other motives began to play an important role for Lee such as gender, modes of production, and egalitarianism with reference to the same type of societies. Among his current research topics is HIV/AIDS in southern Africa, undertaken in particular with Ida Susser.

An essay by Bruce G. Trigger covers a whole range of issues which relate to the nature of human beings including how views on human nature evolved in history, Lee's contribution to these views, and the essence of egalitarianism in foraging societies. Marx's opinions on the precapitalist state are described by Christine Ward Gailey, on the one hand, because they encompass some of the emancipatory rhetoric of contemporary social movements which fight for gender, class, and racial equality; and on the other hand, because Lee was strongly influenced by Marxism.

Jacqueline Solway and Marshall Sahlins's chapters invoke the "affluent society" debate proposed by Sahlins in 1966, which claims that foraging societies have "sufficient material security," and therefore do not invest in labor as much as other societies (for instance, Western societies). This conception is based primarily on Lee's ethnographic work on the !Kung

San, an ethnic variant of the San. Sahlins's thesis questions market universality and presents the economy as a process of material life of societies and not as a "means-end calculation predicated upon omnipresent scarcity" (66). This kind of view is based on the assumption that the San have both limited ends and means in contrast to the neoclassical belief in unlimited ends and limited means. Corresponding to this, Sahlins contends that even an "affluent society" such as hunters and gatherers has economic problems such as decreasing returns with the result that subsequent exertions will lead to fewer benefits, for instance, to fewer food resources. Solway discusses the importance of the idea of the affluent society both in academia and outside and looks at the examination of Sahlins's thesis in the debates of the ecological and cultural anthropologists J. Woodburn, A. Barnard, N. Bird-David, E. Wilmsen, and D. Kaplan.

A chapter by Thomas C. Patterson deals with gender, the history of social and political formation, and human nature. The author illuminates the position of liberal thought on gender which presupposes that gender inequality is natural. Patterson further employs Lee's Marxist approach, highlighting communal aspects of sharing in foraging communities as the basis of gender equality, while asserting that "a stage of primitive communism prevailed before the state and the break-up of societies into classes" (60). Patterson draws on the arguments of E. Wilmsen and J. Denbow which challenge Lee's support for the idea of primitive communism. The author concludes that world systems theory and dependency theory are no different than liberal theories, which imply that human nature is indissoluble and, most importantly, unchangeable.

In the second part of the book, "The Kalahari Then and Now," Renée Sylvain explores three characteristics of popular discourse concerning San (or Bushman, another name for the San) identity: "...Bushman identity is pegged to a unique relationship with the land; second, this relationship is crucial to a premodern lifestyle and identity; and third, class relationships..." (192). The author shares Lee's view that class issues are interconnected with indigenous issues and in support of this argument gives the example of tension over ownership of the land at the Omaheke farm. Chapters by Robert K. Hitchcock and Megan Biesele address the problem of indigenous land rights and tenure rights. They describe a number of measures taken by Ju'hoansi of North-Western Botswana, one San group, the Kalahari Peoples Fund, and local community organizations to acquire land and resource tenure rights. Some of these measures include well-digging, lobbying at various levels of power, collaboration with NGOs, and participation in conferences to draw attention to their problems.

The HIV/AIDS epidemic in southern Africa is discussed in a chapter by Ida Susser. Situating the problem in the Ju'hoansi villages of Botswana and Namibia, the author finds a strong interrelationship between high alcohol consumption and abuses of women, income inequality, improved communications between settlements, and high rates of HIV/AIDS infection.

Among the other contributors are Elizabeth Marshal Thomas and Karen Brodtkin. Thomas discusses the relationship between the San and lions, and the reasons for their peaceful co-existence in the Nyae Nyae area in the 1950s. She also provides an interesting comparison between the lifestyles of lions and the San. A historical perspective on Jewish identity and gender issues is given in Karen Brodtkin's chapter "The Politics and Practices of Egalitarianism." This chapter shares with the rest of the book a sensitivity to "Otherness" and a consideration for the rights of the disadvantaged.

This volume is imbued with a deep admiration for people that is rarely found in the academic literature nowadays. It will be useful not only for anthropologists and other professionals engaged in research on foraging societies (namely the San), but also for everyone interested in learning about different cultures, the nature of human beings, equality and justice, gender, and Marxist thought.

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