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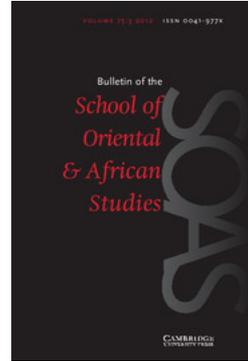
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General Maurice E. F. Bloch: *How we think they think: anthropological approaches to cognition, memory and literacy*. x, 205 pp. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998. £37.95.

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ideological breakthrough, however, is now commonly accepted. Since that time numerous scholars have continued to explore the place of holy men in Muslim societies. Works by Dale Eickelman, R. S. O'Fahey, Vincent Cornell and Valerie Hoffman (to name but a few) have in the intervening years deepened our understanding of the place of religious practitioners and Islamic institutions not only as social actors, but more importantly as centres of social dynamism integral to the well-being of their communities. Professor Lewis's collection would have a greater impact if he had taken this opportunity to revisit his data asking new questions based on the advances of his successors. How did the emanation of Sufi teach-

ings from the coastal towns effect rural-urban relationships? What impact did classical Sufi ideas have on the shape of Somali cosmologies? What does it mean to be a 'saint' in the Somali context? These are all questions Lewis touches on, but does not explore in any detail. By addressing such questions head on, Lewis and others will, in future, be able to draw an even sharper picture of Islam in Somalia and its interaction with the Muslim world as a whole. With his observations based on many trips to the field as well as the material contained in the carefully annotated appendix, Lewis has provided an abundance of raw material; now we must go out and broaden the analysis.

SCOTT S. REESE

GENERAL

MAURICE E. F. BLOCH: *How we think they think: anthropological approaches to cognition, memory and literacy*. x, 205 pp. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998. £37.95.

This book is a collection of 12 essays by one of Britain's leading cognitive anthropologists spanning a period from the late 1960s to the present. Maurice Bloch's central concern in each essay is 'the relation between what is, on the one hand, explicit and conscious—that is to say, the type of informants' knowledge the anthropologists can hope to access easily—and, on the other hand, what is inexplicit or unconscious, but perhaps more fundamental'. The work is divided into three parts grouping the closely related essays under the subject headings of 'Cognition', 'Memory' and 'Literacy'. Bloch's theoretical developments on these issues draw largely upon his abundant ethnographic fieldwork amongst the Merina and Zafimaniry of Madagascar, his brief research in Japan, as well as upon research by his colleagues such as vom Bruck (1991) and Cannell (1992), and the ideas of earlier twentieth-century anthropologists. The broad range of sources and regions supplies the essays with a rich comparative scope, and like Lévi-Strauss's *bricoleur*, Bloch meticulously weaves the material at hand to craft his often persuasive, always thought-provoking, arguments.

The first chapter not only introduces the section on 'Cognition', but also sets out Bloch's scholarly agenda and the theoretical groundwork for the remaining chapters. It is the most purely theoretical chapter, and in many ways the most gratifying. In 'Language, anthropology and cognitive science' Bloch adopts a form of connectionist theory to develop a sophisticated explanation of the speed and efficiency of everyday knowledge. These ideas are rooted more concretely in ethnographic examples in the second chapter. In the remaining essays of this section Bloch develops his arguments about the nature of human concepts and the primacy of implicit knowledge, before going on to illustrate the

compatibility between connectionist theory and notions of domain-specificity.

The second grouping of essays is devoted to explorations of the nature of human memory. In the first essay Bloch contrasts a Platonic notion of memory, premised on a belief that learning is in fact remembering (recalling) what one already knows from birth, with an Aristotelian sense of memory which states that people's minds are shaped by new knowledge as they remember it, like imprints in wax. Ideas about kinship, and the way they create social beings in different societies, are contrasted and related to these traditional views. In the next essay, memory is explored in relation to the house amongst the Zafimaniry of Madagascar. In the remaining two, Bloch uses cognitive psychology to challenge generally accepted notions about the relation between narrative and memory, concluding that 'what is said can never be equated with memory' and non-linguistic memory is equally capable of being transmitted from generation to generation. The last part of the book is devoted to literacy and is mainly a challenge to Goody's thesis (1968) that the introduction of literacy fundamentally changes the nature of culture. Without denying that changes occur, Bloch maintains that the effects on the 'world understanding' of his Malagasy subjects remained superficial, and that literacy merely offered a 'new and better tool' for what language had done before.

Bloch's investigations into the processes of human thinking display an admirable long-term dedication to a demanding theoretical interest. The results are rewarding, and over the past few decades Bloch has challenged the anthropological community to reassess prevailing notions about 'how we think' as humans more generally, and 'how we think they think' when describing the thought processes of the 'other'. Many of Bloch's theories contest mainstream twentieth-century ideas about human cognition and society, including those of Jack Goody on literacy, and point to the shortcomings of other theories, such as Bourdieu's reliance upon a logic-sentential notion of thought. In several essays he strives to advance ideas which are central to his own

concerns such as Atran's (1987, 1990, 1993) and Sperber's (1985) ideas of domain-specificity, Lévi-Strauss's (1979) ideas concerning house-based societies, and Halbwachs's (1925, 1950), Connerton's (1989) and Carruthers's (1990) theories on memory. Bloch's arguments are often stated with tremendous confidence and conviction, finding the notions of certain anthropologists and sociologists 'totally unacceptable', and rendering his literary style with a highly personal quality that forces his readership actively to take sides in the debates.

Inspired by Lévi-Strauss, and sympathetic to the work of Sperber, Bloch has consistently urged a greater collaboration between anthropology and the cognitive sciences. His view is often met with resistance by the prevailing attitudes within the discipline such as the extreme hermeneutic and literary approaches advocated by Geertz, Clifford and Marcus, and Taussig, or the aggressively naturalist approaches advocated by hard-core cognitive anthropologists like Berlin or D'Andrade. Despite Bloch's capable handling of both the abstract theories-of-mind and the ethnographic data, a number of the essays would have benefited from the inclusion of more detailed explanations of the central cognitive theories referred to and how they can directly serve an anthropological understanding of the subject. It is not clear whether Bloch avoids greater theoretical elaboration to spare his reader a confrontation with this often complex material, or whether he expects that his general audience is already familiar with recent trends in the cognitive sciences and psychology. A brief description of Fodor's modularity-of-mind theory (1983) would better define the origins of domain-specificity for his readers, and an elucidation of Halbwachs's theories of memory and Johnson-Laird's notion of mental models (1983) would clarify Bloch's own position on non-linguistic memory. Nevertheless, in my mind, this collection of essays clearly demonstrates the merits of a union between the disciplines, and will hopefully inspire greater recognition of this kind of direction amongst European anthropologists.

TREVOR H. J. MARCHAND

IOAN M. LEWIS: *Arguments with ethnography: comparative approaches to history, politics and religion*. (LSE monographs on Social Anthropology, Vol. 70.) xvii, 167 pp. London: Athlone Press, 1999. £45.

There is one theoretical approach that every undergraduate in the social sciences is quickly taught to dismiss: 'functionalism'. So it is a brave scholar who attempts a defence of the determinedly unfashionable, who stands up for the potentials of 'functionalist' thinking within the discipline of anthropology. Lewis, in the preface to his *Arguments with ethnography*, goes one step further. He makes it the explicit principle linking this set of his collected essays

that span his long and influential career at the LSE. 'Methodological functionalism', argues Lewis, is a much more flexible and useful heuristic concept than it has been given credit for. Rejecting the accusation of determinism, he explains that by the term he means 'simply how social institutions work through the engagement and interests of individuals in different roles and positions' (p. x).

Adopting such a heterodox position takes courage. One of his reasons for doing so, as he explains in his preface, is in response to the academic 'priestcraft' which constantly privileges theoretical novelties at the cost of neglecting earlier work. He is probably right in this regard, though it is hard to see how, without such a dynamic, academic debates within anthropology would ever have moved beyond a crude social evolutionism. Lewis is right also in pointing out the 'unconscious functionalism' that occasionally creeps into writing parading under a very different theoretical banner. In particular, he has little time for the 'cultural determinism' that he identifies in the history of American 'culturology', though this sweeping depiction of the American anthropological tradition relies on the same broad-brush of critique that he decries in relation to the British 'school'.

One of the main challenges to anthropological functionalism was (and is) its neglect of historical process and change. This collection deals with this critique by adopting a historical perspective within which to explore significant functional relationships. 'History functionalised', the first chapter, historicizes the f-word, exploring its various meanings and uses within British social anthropology over time. A valuable historiographical contribution, the chapter charts the development of the 'structural-functionalist' school in relation to the larger political frame of the end of empire. The last chapter 'Ethnography and theory in anthropology' performs a similar role in regard to 'ethnography' and 'theory'. Together these chapters provide a methodological frame for the intervening case studies.

Lewis's own text, which at times amounts to an auto-Festschrift, is rather less explicit about the implications of history for the reception and revision of its own arguments. One of the chapters was first delivered at the major ASA decennial in 1963 (now known as the 'Anglo-American' conference) and published two years later. Fashionably retitled 'Deconstructing descent', the article is unchanged from its 1965 version. It is included in this collection with no reference to the innumerable subsequent debates and critiques of descent theory. Whilst Lewis suggests, in a different context, that we should 'applaud our colleagues' who feel it necessary to revise earlier analyses 'in the retrospective light of history', his own text, written in 1963, seemingly stands up to the scrutiny of time.

Amidst a diversity of offerings, several other chapters remain unrevised. It is not always clear how they fit into the book's larger thesis. One chapter argues that the decolonization of Africa has produced politically plural states, whilst others explore Somali nationalism, spirit-possession in Sudan, religious conversion on the Swahili coast, and shamanism. Forthright,