

A BALINESE FAMILY

Next to Curtis' early hand-cranked cine-photography of Northwest Coast art & culture, which you saw in the film "The Crooked Beak of Heaven", this short B&W film is the earliest use of cinematography in anthropology. The use of film in fieldwork is now a flourishing sub-field called "Visual Anthropology"). This film was shot by Margaret Mead (remember this famous student of Franz Boas from her early work on girls growing up in Samoa) & Gregory Bateson, her husband at the time and also a famous anthropologist who studied "role reversal" ceremonies such as Naven in New Guinea.

Role Reversal Ceremonies-These are life-crises rites" where actors or actresses take on the paraphernalia of the opposite gender: (1.) either to "burlesque" the opposite sex to show one's own gender's "superiority", as was the case of the Melanesian man in the "Naven", who wobbled about as an old hag, daubed in ashes & dressed in rags to emphasize the segregation of men from women, as is characteristic of this culture-geographic area--see the Wormsley book on the Imbi, or, (2.) to confer the prestige of the opposite sex upon one's own gender. Paradoxically, this is done in the process of attaining the "correct" adult status appropriate to one's own gender, as in the Shipibo female puberty rite where, for the only time in her life, the young marriageable girl (what we in the West used to call a "maiden" & whom they call a shontaco), is permitted to wear colorful adult male feather headdresses & other accoutrements at the culmination of her puberty ceremony.

Cultural Scenarios-These recipes of stereotyped action are called "cultural scenarios" by anthropologists, particular behavioral sequences within the larger cultural institution (as a marriage ceremony is a "cultural scenario" within the larger cultural "institution" of marriage). Bateson, who was the first to study these rites seriously, wrote a famous book, still in print, called "Steps to the Ecology of Mind", must reading for the modern learned person. He was one of Mead's many husbands.

-This film was a result of the "Culture & Personality" movement surrounding WWII, the 1st impact of psychology on anthropology. The question was, how did culture affect personality? These early students tended to see personality as almost exclusively a product of "enculturation" (the growing-up process), hence the interest in child-rearing cross-culturally.

-This is also an example of long-term fieldwork; note the time duration between the scenes. You are actually watching people growing up due to multiple revisits.

-This film is also an example of "ethology" within ethnography. Note that you just here the "voice-over narration" of the anthropologist. You do not here the

conversation or responses of the Balinese. The center of attention is simply human behavior and what can be deduced from that. It is a "natural laboratory" approach, with props brought in like the ball or dolls to test for the cultural responses (does the child play with the doll? Harm it or nurture it? Share it or keep it to him/herself?, etc.).

-Note also the large size of this family. The Balinese occupy the tropical island of Bali at the very end of the Indonesian archipelago, a constellation of some 3,000 islands including the big western islands of Sumatra, just off the Malay Peninsula, and Java, the next large island to the east. This is the 4th most populous country in the world at present (2001), a classic 3rd World state that emerged after WWII from the Dutch colonial empire, and is in the process of falling apart economically and politically as various independence movements & religious warring groups (principally the Muslims versus the Christians & Hindus) fight each other & the weak & corrupt central government. It is a good candidate for the "Failed State" of P&B. Islam spread thru the Indonesian archipelago in later times, replacing Hinduism, which had arrived earlier via trading fleets from India. While Hinduism is now gone on the big islands. It continues to survive in Bali, noted for its beautiful art.

-The 1st manifestation of Hinduism is the "210th-day Birthday Hair-cutting Ritual". The Balinese use the lunar calendar, not the Western Solar calendar. Hair has magical connotations all over the world. If a child survives long enough to grow its hair so that it can be cut, this usually marks its first "birthday", as here. Hair, as the British structural anthropologist Sir Edmund Leach, has cross-cultural libidinal (life-force) meaning.

Rites-This prayer event is also an example of a "rite", a kind of "cultural scenario" with supernatural (magico-religious) connotations. This can be divided into 2 categories: (1.) ritual, a private sequence of behaviors where the "primary audience" is a supernatural, as in the hair-cutting ritual where the old grandmother is shown praying directly to the Hindu deities, and (2.) public "ceremonies", where the primary audience is other human beings, even tho supernaturals are believed to be present or are invoked, as in a Western marriage ceremony or the coronation of a British king or queen. Much can be deduced about the values of a culture from its rites.

-Pro-Natalism=You also see the large family size (6 children) characteristic of agricultural societies, which are all "pro-natalist" due to the heavy demands of labor & the fact that children constitute "cheap" ag. labor whose benefits out-weigh their caloric costs (at least until adulthood). The Balinese practice the most intensive wet rice (paddy) agriculture in the world at 2 crops per year & have hydraulically

modified their entire island to convert steep slopes into "arable land" via labor-intensive rice terraces fed by intricate irrigation systems (Boserup's "agricultural intensification"), now broken into tiny "postage-stamp" fields" via Geertz's "agricultural involution". No wonder they value so many children! The entire green tropical landscape shines like a topographic-map mirror from the terraced water in an intricate layer cake of modified hill-sides!

-Child Nurse. With such large families the mother cannot look after all the children, so she assigns a young daughter to take care of the even smaller siblings. You see this mechanism with the shaven-headed "child nurse" gakhti in the film who struggles to carry kenjoen, the youngest child, in a baby-sling (note the feminine "lower-body carrying tech." I mentioned earlier). This practice accomplishes 2 goals: (1.) it takes the demands of child care off the over-burdened mother, and, (2.) trains the young girl in child-care for her future role as wife & mother, the universal expected status for women in traditional societies. At the end of the film you see kenjoen looked after by the eldest daughter as she has grown too big for gakhti to look after. This is the last stage of the "child nurse" before adulthood.

-Walking Rail=Mead shows & mentions the contrast between the "Walking Rail" & the Western "Playpen". Balinese children learn to walk by holding on to a single rail set between two posts in the household plaza, versus the American child who is placed within a caged playpen, made safe by internal blankets & the external bars from the outside world, which is regarded as dangerous by Westerners, not by the Balinese.

-Cultural Recipes for Child-rearing. Each culture has its own "style" of child-rearing, and, in turn, this tends to produce a similar personality response as the child grows to adulthood. This is called a "modal personality" (not that people are all alike, just that adults within a given culture are enculturated to emphasize certain personality traits, like Westerners bred for "independence" & "competitiveness". Mead's findings show that Balinese mothers tease their children & lavish affection upon their youngest but then redirect their affection when another child is born. This transfer leaves the 2nd youngest child angry & temper-tantrumish as a result of the withdrawal of adult attention. The result is:

Sibling Rivalry-Where "siblings", brothers & sisters, vie for the attention of the parents & engage in fighting or teasing with each other (note how gakhta, the 2nd-oldest child, a boy, causes his younger sister, kenjoen, to cry; note how she jealously holds onto her mother's other breast while suckling, thus preventing her brother from doing so). Westerners deal with this universal problem by regarding children as **miniature adults**, taking the eldest aside & explaining how he/she should love the youngest. Balinese deal with this theatrically via the mechanism of

the:

Borrowed Baby-You see the mother borrow a niece & hold the baby in her arms, teasing her youngest, kenjoen, who then is picked up, but continues to cry out of jealousy. The return of the "borrowed baby" shows the youngest that she/he is not in danger of being supplanted in her parent's affections & also lets him/her express sibling rivalry theatrically, via a borrowed baby, not with his/her own sibling, a neat solution to the problem.

The Stereotyped Personality Trajectory-The result of these alterations of affections & attention produces profound effects on the personality of the growing child. In the case of the Balinese this produces the following stages in the unfolding of the personality: (1.) an early receptive, happy stage of the youngest, kenjoen at the beginning of the film, (2.) a sulky, unresponsive phase of the 2nd-youngest as he/she is replaced in the parent's attentions, as in the case of her brother, gahkta, at the beginning of the film, (3.) a happy, but non-responsive, adult personality structure where persons are socially-engaged, but reserved. Note, that **even when there is no youngest sibling in the Karma family, kenjoen is treated as if she had a younger sibling** at the end of the film, just as her brother had been at the beginning. This shows the strength of "recipes" over social reality.

Maternal Fathers-Balinese fathers play a much more central role in child-rearing than, traditionally, did North American fathers, who were largely absent authority figures ("wait till father gets home", the traditional warning of frustrated mothers to errant children). Thus you see father Karma doing things that no North American father would do: giving the baby his breast to quiet her, almost as if he was "suckling" her! and intervening to bathe his son when his wife refused to do so. Thus, in Balinese gender equations the definition of "masculine" includes several "feminine" values (from the Western perspective). This shows the overlapping model of gender roles in this fairly pacific society versus the extreme segregation in the warlike West.