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*Pinikindu* is a study of the northern Mandak people of central New Ireland, Papua New Guinea. The main focus of the book is on the symbols through which the Mandak of Pinikindu village define and articulate interpersonal and intergroup relationships. Nurture emerges as the focal symbol within a symbolic pattern that includes maternal nurture, paternal substance and affinal nurture. Since the general focus of the study is on the symbols expressed in social relationships, Clay is critical of the traditions of kinship analysis in anthropology which proceed by other methods. Thus, she parts with those who predefine social categories by genealogical criteria, favouring instead the approach of David Schneider and others who consider social categories in terms of the social group's own definitions of their person-to-person relationships.

As an interpretive account of the shared understandings of another people, Clay tells us that maternal nurture, for example, entails symbolic associations between female, “being of one kind”, taro, same social unit and sharing. These symbols of maternal nurture emerge in a variety of social contexts, and contrast with symbols of paternal substance. Thus, while maternal nurture has to do with social unit identity and sharing of food and wealth, paternal substance derives from a male procreative role in which the gift of blood, bone and internal organs extends in its wider social dimension to convey meanings of exchange and cross-unit relationships. In a matrilineal people, such notions of blood and male substance are of particular ethnographic interest.

Chapter 4, entitled “The Sexual Dichotomy”, continues the discussion of maternal nurture and paternal substance and the concomitant notions of sharing and exchange. Clay introduces here some additional data concerning other symbolic concepts of “male” and “female” as they emerge from the division of labour, residential separation, food (for example, female taro and male fish), language and names. This deepens our appreciation of the main lines of this interpretive exercise. However, as Clay notes at the outset, the symbols she chooses to elaborate (nurture, maternal nurture, paternal substance and affinal nurture) do not interpret the total social environment. This is a major limitation of the study. There is, it would appear, another very interesting account of Mandak social life struggling to emerge. Some details of this story are supplied in the opening sections of the book, particularly in Chapter 1, where we are told something about the geography, economy and political history of this region of central New Ireland.

The northern Mandak people are shifting cultivators and fisher-people who no longer produce sago or go big shark hunting. Cocoa is a recently introduced cash crop, and Mandak have had their own coconut plantations since the early 1950’s. German and English copra marketers were in the area as early as the late 19th century. The Mandak spend their income from wage labour and from copra and cocoa production on a variety of consumer items, and each hamlet now owns a truck. The trade in food items between women from the coast and women from inland villages came to a halt in the early 1950’s, and women now make the long journey to Kavieng and Namatanai markets about once a month to sell their vegetables. In 1950 also, the paramount Luluai forbade the use in feast exchanges of strands of shell-disks manufactured in the Pinikindu area, thus putting an end to that particular medium of exchange.

While Clay’s interpretive account of cultural symbols tells us something about the contextual definition of wealth and its power to effect social relationships, it does not
tell us about the meaningful intercourse among kin and affines as changes occur in the media of exchange, and as some wealth becomes “decontextualised”. We are given hints at the Mandak attempt to keep symbolic meanings attached to new wealth, for instance, by defining shillings as “food received”, but there is no discussion of what one suspects must be a move in the other direction, given the changes noted above.

The limitations of the study emerge again in Chapter 7, where Clay compares Mandak symbolic inversions with what she perceives to be similar transformations of symbolic elements in several other societies. The mode of analysis is one which proposes simple ideas in a cloud of verbal congestion. Thus, we hear that “ritual speeches by women serve as transformational contexts for the female metaphorization of male cross-unit exchanging” (p. 139). Moreover, the containment of the analysis to a symbolic dimension obscures the power aspects of social interactions. In myth and ritual, we are told, one sex takes on the cultural roles of the other. In Arapesh male initiation, for instance, Clay quotes data showing male actors in female guise “giving birth” to the initiates, an act of cultural procreation which advances the youths to membership in a privileged social group, a political consequence Clay’s analysis does not pursue. Symbolic inversion does more than merely express both sides of a symbolic dialogue. In addition, the restricted focus of the social world of nurture does not prepare us for the information in the concluding pages that Mandak point to the current prevalence of sorcerers in their society. I would agree with Clay’s final assessment that the value of a symbolic focus in cultural analysis lies in its emphasis on some crucial, and often ignored, features of cultural meaning. I would add, however, that the dynamics of social life from which the symbols emerge, may also be overlooked.

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The “New Guinea Research Bulletins”, which ceased publication when the Unit’s contribution to Papua New Guinea Studies was succeeded by the country’s own Institute of Applied Social and Economic Research, were designed to make readily and quickly available the results of investigations within a range of disciplines. Here we have an anthropologist whose skills not only further an academic debate of some importance, but are directed towards planners and policy makers involved in “development”.

The Nagovisi of Bougainville, like other Melanesians observing matrilineal descent, are popularly thought to have special problems in adjusting to modernisation. The introduction of cash cropping to such societies is held to raise the level of land dispute and create intolerable strains between the father-son dyad and the institution of matriliney. Nash quotes from the Government’s Annual Reports which repeatedly assert that “in communities in which inheritance is based on matrilineal descent, an increasing number of men are coming to want their own children to succeed to their land rights. Again, it is natural for progressive individuals who have planted perennial crops or made other improvements to their land to hope to pass rights to their own children as individuals...” (p. 3). Nagovisi have not only taken up the planting of cocoa with some enthusiasm: they have done so with their matrilineal institutions intact. Fathers are