

search funds are lacking, and where anthropologists cannot stay in the field long enough to gain a full comprehension of all factors in the case.

Chisungu: A Girl's Initiation Ceremony Among the Bemba of Northern Rhodesia. AUDREY I. RICHARDS. New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1957. 224 pp., appendices, frontispiece 18 figures, 16 illustrations. \$6.50.

Reviewed by HORTENSE POWDERMAKER, *Queens College*

Richards had the good fortune to witness the chisungu or female initiation ceremony during her first field work among the Bemba in 1931. The book is a detailed description, analysis, and interpretation of the rites in relation to their cultural setting and in the conceptual terms of pertinent theories. Two valuable appendices give the distribution of the chisungu ceremonies in central Africa, and the texts, translations, and interpretations of the songs.

The twenty-three day ceremony is described in detail, to provide the first full account of nubility rites for this area. It includes the feeling-tone of the actors, unfortunately omitted in so many accounts of rituals in primitive societies, and comments and interpretations made by them during the ceremony. The completeness of the description increases its usefulness for comparative studies of different cultural groups in this and other areas, for the psychologist interested in symbolic behavior, and for the linguist interested in the ritual use of language.

Richards questions the circular nature of the explanation of ritual advanced by Durkheim and Radcliffe-Brown—that group experiences at a ceremony intensify loyalty and the ceremony exists because the group has such strong feelings and insists on holding one. But a circular explanation in terms of mutual reinforcements may be very useful. However, we think Richards' broader frame of reference, which gives multiple explanations and includes not only society but also groups within it and individuals, is far more significant for understanding the many-sided nature of all symbolic behavior.

The expressed purposes of the chisungu are concerned with the girl's assumption of a new role through marriage and womanhood. There are symbolic acts of separation and of rejoining the community, which occur in other Bemba rituals to mark a change in social role. "An element of test, or actually of ordeal, in the magic sense of the word" reflects the anxiety of parents and relatives as to whether the girl is really grown up and fit to assume her new role. There are rites to remove the girl's fear of blood and of the dangers of sex and fire, all associated with the onset of puberty. The magic influence of sex, blood, and fire are thought to be highly dangerous when brought into wrongful contact with each other. The Bemba have an extremely complex belief in the association between chieftainship, fire, sex, and power to influence the fertility of land and of people. The much desired fertility is produced by conduct pleasing to the ancestors and to relatives, by the blessings of those in authority, and by carrying out the proper rituals.

As Richards points out, many anthropologists have described initiation rites as the "only formal education" received by a child, and most accounts of girls' puberty rites in this area say, "the girls are then given *instruction* in sex and motherhood." Bemba women say that they are teaching (*ukufundu*) the girls, and the same term is used today for European school teaching, which may account for the confusion. As far as Richards could ascertain, no direct instruction took place; there would have been very little time for it, and the situation was not conducive to it. The girls sat in the corner of the

initiation hut and were often told not to watch what was going on, and part of the time their heads were wrapped in thick blankets. The Bemba girls needed no instruction, in the European sense of the term, in the nature of sexual intercourse, in how to bear and bring up children, in how to cook and to garden, or in the other "things of womanhood" and "things of the garden." What the girls learned were secret terms, known only to initiated women, and the chisungu songs, some of which have a secret meaning apart from the overt one. They also learned the socially approved attitudes toward their new duties as wife and mother, namely, acceptance of a new sense of responsibility.

The author makes use of the songs, the pottery, and other symbolic emblems associated with the ceremony in her interpretations. This purely feminine rite is linked with the other important tribal ceremonies surrounding chieftainship and the use of land. Underlying all the ceremonies is the "dogma which links authority with the exercise of supernatural power based on access to ancestral spirits by those who have correctly handled sex and fire." Those in authority must have ceremonial intercourse with head wives, and light a new fire on ritual occasions.

Richards makes a number of interesting hypotheses correlating the chisungu with the social structure and values of the tribe. One hypothesis correlates the emphasis placed on girls' fertility rites with matrilineal descent. Since the girl's children belong to her family, it is their gain if she produces children. Other hypotheses are: matriliney characterized by absence of marriage payments and an instability of marriage is correlated with anxieties and taboos centering around the beginning of married life; matriliney combined with uxorilocal marriage is correlated with the initial inferiority of the young husband and the compensating honors given him in the girls' initiation rites and in the marriage rites; emphasis on the family rather than the lineage in the chisungu is correlated with the fact that the clan and lineage in this society do not function politically as corporate groups except in the case of royal dynasty.

The function of the chisungu in relation to unconscious tensions and conflicts is touched upon. Richards notes the universality of many symbols (such as the serpent and the mimetic representations of journeys through dark and difficult places to reach safety) and the multiple meanings—some standardized and some highly individual—which are given to the symbolic objects. She indicates how a long, complex ritual such as the chisungu, "inevitably represents a cluster of ideas, understood, half-understood or merely felt." She makes an interesting but very tentative suggestion about a possible "connection between the lack of open hostility between the sexes and an unconscious feeling of guilt at robbing the man of his children, expressed in fears on the part of the women that the men will leave them, and on the part of the men that their wives will not respect them unless taught to do so by the chisungu." Richards' hypotheses and suggestions, some of which she labels "guesses," are fruitful leads for others to follow up in similar societies.

The book is in memoriam to the late Bronislaw Malinowski, and Richards carries on and extends his tradition for brilliant field work, intimate knowledge of the people, detailed and logical analysis, and interpretations based on sociological and psychological assumptions about society, groups, and individuals. The author's sophisticated approach to the variety of purposes served by ritual is in sharp contrast to the rather simplified approach to the study of rites of passage as a means of creating or representing group ties, which has been popular since the days of Van Gennep. It is our guess that Richards' book will become a classic for the study of initiation rites.