

however. Her examination of the reasons for choice of a specific spouse do not deal much with class or kinship concerns. These seem to be at least as important, if not more so, than the factors she does enumerate, which include the avoidance of *burakumin* (social pariahs), care for personal health of spouse, property considerations, the age of the bride, and religion. The non-specialist in Japanese studies may also find her use of no fewer than 200 Japanese words and concepts rather hard to follow. She makes some allowance for this by including a glossary of terms in the appendices, but the appearance of several unfamiliar words in the same sentence can occasionally prove problematic. These criticisms do not seriously detract from the meaning and clarity of her work; there is no doubt this book will prove a vibrant example for future researchers.

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Virginia Huffer. *The Sweetness of the Fig: Aboriginal Women in Transition*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1980) x, 166 pp., \$15.00.

During 1970 and 1973, University of Maryland professor of psychiatry Virginia Huffer spent some time with the women of the Lardil and Kaiadilt tribes who live on Mornington Island in northern Australia's Gulf of Carpentaria. Forced to accommodate increasingly to Western ways, these women struggle to maintain traditional linkages while they undergo modern change. This conflict between the past and the future, as well as the everyday realities of their existence, are presented through Huffer's psychobiographical lens, primarily through the intervention and words of her chief informant, Elsie Roughsey, a "cooperative, friendly, generous, and intelligent" Lardil woman who is, in aboriginal terms, a "good yarner." Elsie's tribal name—Labbarrior—"sweetness of the fig"—gives the book its title. The work is essentially Elsie's statements mixed with descriptive and analytical observations by the author and short treatments of interviews with nine older Lardil women, seven younger (teens through twenties) Lardil women, and seven Kaiadilt women.

Lardil children had been brought to Mornington Island in the 1920s to be educated by white missionaries. Other Lardil continued to exist

on the edges of white mainland society (indeed, 10% of the younger women had Aussie fathers). Thus, the Lardil had considerable contact with Western society. The Kaiadilt had not been subjected to a systematic missionary effort. They did not come to Mornington until 1948, after “inter-hordal” warfare on their isolated Bentinck Island had so decimated their numbers that they too were moved to the larger island. The Kaiadilt were (and are) a paleolithic people who, as late as 1970, lived in brush shelters, had a limited knowledge of English, and maintained aboriginal marriage patterns. The Kaiadilt remained aloof from Huffer and their Lardil neighbors, who considered them “wild,” “without shame,” and even capable of smearing dung on themselves. Huffer was somewhat more successful in talking with the younger Lardil women, although here too the contact was perfunctory. Only with the Lardil women in her own age group (late thirties to fifties) was she able to make thorough contact, especially with Elsie Roughsey.

Huffer’s work, then, is naggingly incomplete, even though she does give the reader a vivid picture of Elsie’s perceptions. On a lesser scale, Elsie’s middle-aged contemporaries also express themselves, urged to participate, perhaps by Elsie’s example, perhaps by Huffer’s refusal to publish any material that the women might not want in print. The interviews make clear that despite changed courtship and marriage patterns, life in electrified dwellings, cotton dresses, the introduction of a money economy, and new forms of employment, these Lardil women still generally believe in “wrong-head” vs. “right-head” marriages as well as sorcery, prophetic dreams, traditional song and dance ceremonies, *malgri* (an illness resulting from having the smell of land food on one’s hand when one goes into the sea), and madness being caused by a lack of sex. They expressed mixed feelings about the Aussies, viewing them on the one hand as protectors, teachers, and persons who brought about a fuller participation of aboriginal women in village religious and political life, but on the other hand admitting that “the white man came to take away all our good laws and customs and put in their poor stuff.”

Huffer realizes that Lardil women vary in their attachment to and evaluation of specific aspects of traditional and gives them an individuality often missing in anthropological works.

She has difficulty, however, in assessing the experiences and perceptions of the younger Lardil and all Kaiadilt women. We learn, for example, that the younger Kaiadilt “feared being discriminated against,” but the reader is given only a fragmentary sense of how the discrimination operates. We hear of wife abuse, adultery, gambling, drunkenness, widespread illegitimacy, and intergenerational friction. Some, if not all, of these appear symptomatic of societal breakdown

but viewed against the vibrancy of Elsie's responses, the reality of such social tensions is obscured. For an authentic understanding of these aboriginal women, we need to know what the younger Lardil feel about their own sexual promiscuity and the illegitimacy of their children in comparison to the older generation. And why did the Kaiadilt treat Huffer with "a passive type of hostile avoidance?" Was it simply "social distance," as she maintains, or was it that she, as a white woman prying into their lives, represented an intrusive force? The fact that the Kaiadilt and younger Lardil were well aware that Huffer was friendly with the older Lardil, with whom relations were rather tense, and that Huffer probed her interviewees about sexual intimacy may well have limited the extent to which they would share information. They could not assert as freely as Elsie, "I have nothing to be ashamed of." Entering into the lives of people who are culturally different from the investigator is the anthropologist's perennial problem which Virginia Huffer has not been able to surmount. Nevertheless, Huffer does give us a good treatment of one informant and, notwithstanding its serious shortcomings, her work is important. Too often, Third World women have been denied any voice at all.

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Leo Kanowitz. *Equal Rights: The Male Stake*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1981) viii, 153 pp., \$19.95, \$9.95 paper.

Although it may be true that the equal rights movement for women will result in freeing both women and men from social and legal restrictions (and, in fact, it may be a rather convincing practical political argument), as a feminist, I find a book that supports these rights for women on the basis of reciprocally increased rights for men suspect. It reminds me of Thomas Jefferson arguing, in *Notes on Virginia*, against the continuation of slavery because of its debilitating moral effects on owners and their families. Leo Kanowitz, professor of law at the University of California, Hastings College of the Law, and author of other books on women and the law, makes such an argument in this collection of eight essays, most of which have been previously published elsewhere (from 1972 to 1981).