remained formative. Vansina does not suggest that he was influenced by African cosmological and political thinking. Though noting that he internalised African attitudes during fieldwork, he has not been interested in working such a dialogic relationship into a historical genre—except, of course, by the structure of this book! Its form cannot wholly account for a relationship between individual, society, and historiography, but it offers an absorbing and accessible perspective. All who were protagonists or have known protagonists of Vansina's story will check the index and decide how full and fair is the account. All readers will be struck by the lively and energetic intelligence and the commitment to the history of Africa. Vansina himself suggests that his work on grounded theory has been overlooked. Contrary to his fear (p. 246), others beside its editor have read his article "The Power of Systematic Doubt in Historical Enquiry," yet I feel that Vansina at his best transcends the limits he sets himself theoretically. That others will provide very different readings of this book is actually a tribute to this ability.

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Social Structure and Religious Ideology in India

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Status and Sacredness: A General Theory of Status Relations and an Analysis of Indian Culture. By Murray Milner Jr. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1994. 336 pp.

With Milner's Status and Sacredness we find ourselves dealing once again with the old difference in paradigms with regard to "Indian sociology"—the notion of a "confluence of Sociology and Indology" (Dumont and Pocock 1957:7)—and, more generally, the relationship between social structure and religious ideology. This means that I had better leave much of the content of the book to someone more familiar with what Bailey (1959:100) has called this "branch of culturology." In his complex and erudite work Milner is concerned with a kind of "traditional India" and not what he calls "contemporary urban India" (p. 229) or "the real" India (p. 14). And for this so-called traditional India, which is a Hindu India, he looks to central structural features (p. 205)—

structuralism here stands for "French" structuralism à la Lévi-Strauss (p. 300 n. 29)—for the intellectual tools needed to identify patterns of deep structure (p. 215). However, Milner repeatedly points to the selectivity of his analysis and regularly gives us "down-to-earth" theses, thus modifying that analysis. If in the end I were to offer certain criticisms, there is a chance that Milner might agree with me, answering that he had simply selected a different approach.

He uses the first three chapters to discuss general sociological issues. In his "resource structuralism" he seeks to differentiate between the resources wealth, force, and status as important structural aspects (p. 6), and in line with this he distinguishes economic, political, and status power (p. 27). With forms of capital he comes to symbolic capital and especially to one of its aspects, social status (pp. 8–11). He takes the distinctive characteristics of status as an independent variable because he wants to trace their influence on patterns of interaction and group formation (p. 11; also pp. 22, 28). He then comes to a point of view once called "configurationalism": Indians are not a special species (he opposes "Orientalism"), and their society can be compared with other societies "when we take into account the particular configuration of resources they have available to them" (p. 14). In India "status and moral worth have been less directly dependent upon economic and political power than in most other complex societies" (p. 16). He goes on to link status with sacredness ("that which is set apart and defined as other than the profane" [pp. 20–21]).

After introducing what he considers the core attributes of Hinduism—the caste system, patterns of political-economic dominance, and three sets of important cultural ideas: purity, sexual asceticism, and auspiciousness (p. 42)—in nine chapters Milner analyses a number of related phenomena. I can refer only to some of the points that he raises. Unlike Dumont, he does not accept an absolute distinction between status and power: he defines status as a particular form of power, backed by sanctions rooted in expressions of approval and disapproval (p. 53). As might be expected, the control of political and economic power is seen as dependent on the status order via rajadharma and by placing the jajmani system in a religious and ritual perspective. Here I would mention one of his "down-to-earth" remarks: "If the nature of the status order has an impact upon the political and economic order, the reverse is even more true" (p. 96).

Aiming to highlight the significance and the operation of non-material resources, Milner focuses on the sacred as a crucial source of power (p. 164) and on sacral relations, which tend to copy and at the same time transform patterns of social relations. We then come to what he calls "reversals," as in Christianity, where (p. 169) "the resources and deprivations of the present world shall at some point in time be distributed." The reversal between the Calvinist eschatology where we find in the world-to-come an absolute caste system (with the eternally damned and the elect) and the fluid and permeable

human roles and identities in the capitalist world (p. 216). According to Milner, in Hinduism we find structural reversals between the key doctrines of Hinduism (he discusses *samsara, karma,* and *moksa* as central tenets of Hindu eschatology) and the key structural features of caste (prohibition of mobility, ascription, and a preoccupation with differentiating identities) (p. 215). Milner's hypothesis (p. 223) is that "where societies are significantly stratified and where religions attempt to develop the commitment of the masses, there will be strong tendencies toward reversals."

Having conveyed something of the flavour of Milner's work, let me now try to raise some points of criticism. Here I do not touch the debate on the sociology of values and ideas; I have already confessed belonging to the Bailey faction.

I find it very hard to insulate status from wealth and power in this part of the old Eurasian empires with "plow and irrigation cultures" and land, water, literacy, and skills as scarce resources. In these complex societies with states and elites we find in-marriage systems to preserve "property" (in its widest sense) within the group (Goody 1976:20–21). If we really want to look for status based on non-material resources, the sub-Saharan African tribesmen can provide good examples of chiefs and big men possessing and controlling occult powers as their main resource (e.g., Ouden 1995:3–4).

I wonder why Milner stresses only castes as status groups. Why not take into account the horizontal aspects and the ordering in blocs of ethnic groups, castes included (Marriott 1960:54)? In fact, the old Kerala unilinear type (Marriott 1960:26) is very rare. I agree with Berreman (1967:54) that "all caste systems are characterized by plural features similar to those found in the Indian instance. . . . all caste systems are held together in large measure by considerations of relative power among castes—power expressed physically, economically, politically, and socially."

Why link status only with caste? What about the honor or respect accorded individuals and families within castes, villages, and regions on the basis of their behaviour, often without any linkage to caste whatsoever? I confess to having made such mistakes myself. During a revisit of my Tamilnadu villages in 1981, while walking with friends I was asked whether I knew a man we encountered. I recognized him and gave them his caste and subcaste. My friends laughed and said that they had expected this answer. "Why not tell us what we did together when you were here, or say that he is a small farmer, or that he is a good and nice man? You really are caste-ridden!" Perhaps it was because of my own background, coming from a castelike situation in the old rural north-eastern part of the Netherlands.

Why not consider a variety of criteria influencing the positions of groups in the economic, political, and socioritual field that might offer the possibility of a better understanding of status inconsistencies? Here I think of control of material resources, coercion, indispensability to the dominant caste, monopolies of access to supernatural forces, the special position of "literate outcastes"

(merchant groups with interregional functions [see, e.g., Ouden 1969: passim]; Milner touches on this phenomenon on p. 15). Attributional status criteria for me come last of all; to me they very often seem rationalizations of existing political-economic power relations.

In considering the South and South-East Asian situation, we have to realize that from the 17th century onwards European chartered companies and, later, colonial powers were opposing and cutting off ascending urban bourgeois classes and capitalist tendencies. Indian society was made more "conservative," a development strengthened by a caste-ridden judicial customary law system (cf. Kolff 1992:221–34; perhaps I should even point to the post-independence legal system of extreme protective discrimination on the basis of castes and tribes). Milner calls his work to some degree static and ahistorical (p. 228), but it seems to me that this point is of great importance for understanding Indian stratification and plural systems.

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