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Bearing in Mind

Birth, Fathers, Ritual, and ‘Reproductive Consciousness’ in Transpersonal Anthropological Perspective

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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in
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Gregg Lahood
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Abstract

*Bearing in Mind: Birth, Fathers, Ritual, and 'Reproductive Consciousness' in Transpersonal Anthropological Perspective* is an exploration of ‘unusual’ psychospiritual experiences among a small group of procreative fathering males in New Zealand and the viewing of these experiences through a transpersonal anthropological lens. I have used the transpersonal literature and the anthropological record, coupled with fieldwork among contemporary males to explore some of their more ‘non-ordinary’ responses to childbirth, paying close attention to the symbolic and therapeutic dimension implicated in their participation.

Frequently their narratives suggest psychological encounters with death and transpersonal states of consciousness. This research examines these states of consciousness, the broad cultural context from which they arise and their relationship to birthing. Two basic themes are explored: 1) the social shaping of birth as a transpersonal event and ritual at the time fathers joined their partners in birthing during the late 1960s, and 2) an investigation of the transpersonal experience itself. Such phenomena have wide anthropological ramifications which opens a third theme for exploration: the possible parallels with more traditional, shamanistic, and/or indigenous midwifery and obstetrical manoeuvres (and therefore religion) – these parallels will be outlined and explored. This thesis relies heavily on a reinterpretation of the transpersonal and anthropological literature; however it is the fieldwork (gathering birth stories from men and women) that is crucial because it is the transpersonal content of their stories that drives the theoretical component.

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1 The term ‘non-ordinary’ pertains to NOSC or non ordinary states of consciousness (see glossary).
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# Table of Contents

1 Abstract

ii Acknowledgements II

ii Table of Contents III

1 Introduction: Conceiving Men 1
2 Method and Ethics 27
3 Anthropology and Reproductive Consciousness 47
4 The Emergence of Transpersonal Anthropology 101
5 Womb Envy: The Hell of the Hungry Ghosts 129
6 Running the Gauntlet: Re-cognising Male Reproductive Manoeuvres 183
7 The Fathers’ Shore: Transpersonal Comprehensions at the Site of Birth 221
8 Skulls at the Banquet: Near Birth as Nearing Death? 268
9 Spiritual Emergency: Three Male Reproductive Crises 301
10 Conclusions 327

Appendix 1 The Attack of the Flower People 332
Appendix 2 Original Thesis Plan 377
Appendix 3 Information Sheet and Consent Form 382
Glossary of Terms 385
Bibliography 386