

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

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

Doctor of Philosophy
in
Social Anthropology

at Massey University, Albany,
New Zealand.

Gregg Lahood

2006

Abstract

Bearing in Mind: Birth, Fathers, Ritual, and 'Reproductive Consciousness' in Transpersonal Anthropological Perspective is an exploration of 'unusual' psycho-spiritual 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.¹

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.

¹ The term 'non-ordinary' pertains to NOSC or non ordinary states of consciousness (see glossary).

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to the following people; all of the fathers, mothers (including my own) and midwives who participated in this research and all of the people who offered anecdotal material and insights into their personal birthing experiences. I am especially grateful to my anthropological supervisors Kathryn Rountree and Graeme MacCrae. I would like to acknowledge my brothers Mark and Jeff and for their financial assistance. Special thanks to my transpersonal 'elders'; John Heron and Stan Grof who read earlier drafts of some of the following chapters. Two friends and co-workers deserve special acknowledgment for their support and encouragement and many useful conversations - Sue Ewan and midwife Judy Cottrell. I would like to thank the library staff at Massey University for their endless patience and helpfulness; Bill Taylor and Danny MacIntyre for their ongoing and support. Finally a special thanks to editors Marcie Boucouvalas (*Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*) and Bruce Greyson (*Journal of Near-Death Studies*) who have published versions of chapters 8 and 9 in their respective journals.

Table of Contents

| | | |
|-------------------|---|-----|
| i | Abstract | I |
| 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 |