

Correspondence

A Reply to LaFleur

Professor LaFleur, in his commentary on my essay about the Kataragama pilgrimage, speculates that I think my data disconfirm Victor Turner's theory of pilgrimage, or at least its applicability to the Kataragama case (*JAS* 38, no. 2 [1979]: 272). I made no such assertion in my essay because, in my judgment, Turner's theory is too general to be falsified by the Kataragama data. Only its explanatory utility is called into question. Turner has suggested, on the one hand, that the *raison d'être* of pilgrimage is that it provides *communitas*, which, in Turner's definition and in my usage of the term, is a joyful, spontaneous experience—a sweeping revelation of brotherhood and unity with a diverse group of people. Yet, recognizing that spontaneous *communitas* does not commonly occur on pilgrimages, Turner has argued that, on the other hand, pilgrimages persist because they are enjoyable. Pilgrims, in Turner's view, may seek some vestige of *communitas* by participating in the egalitarian social relations of pilgrimage. Furthermore, Turner argues, pilgrimages persist because, as LaFleur puts it, they relieve individuals of "quotidian pressures to fit certain social roles and functions" (p. 272). The Kataragama data do not decisively disconfirm Turner's theory, despite the fact that Hindu pilgrims deny the experience of *communitas* at the site or on the pilgrimage trek (which, contrary to LaFleur's charge, I did investigate). While I find it difficult to accept the proposition that the Kataragama pilgrimage persists among Hindus because it provides *communitas* experiences, it is nevertheless conceivable that the quest for *communitas* or for enjoyable experiences helps to dislodge pilgrims from village and town life. To avoid misinterpretation, I noted on p. 258 of my essay that the pursuit of *communitas*, or "at least the desire to escape from onerous social relations, may indeed be an unconscious motive for many pilgrims." Given this caveat, it is difficult to understand how LaFleur could conclude that I sought to disconfirm Turner's theory.

Furthermore, I never denied that Turner's characterization of pilgrimage as egalitarian, peripheral, and miraculous applies to Kataragama. I repeatedly emphasized that, contrary to LaFleur's misinterpretation (p. 278), an egalitarian ethos suffuses the Kataragama pilgrimage (e.g., p. 253). Not realizing that I did not seek to deny the descriptive utility of Turner's theory, LaFleur suggests that, since my approach emphasizes the same qualities of the pilgrimage as does Turner's, I have inadvertently demonstrated Turner's theory (e.g., pp. 228–72). But a theory must do more than describe a social phenomenon; a useful theory explains it adequately and highlights its implications. Without denying that pilgrims might find the social relations of pilgrimage attractive, I used alternative explanatory strategies that highlighted the differences between the Tamil Hindu and Sinhalese Buddhist traditions of pilgrimage to Kataragama. These differences might have remained invisible had I tried to explain both traditions in terms of a quest for *communitas* or for freedom from onerous roles.

LaFleur also speculates on my motives for writing the essay. Noting that I intended to assess the integrative functions of the Kataragama pilgrimage in Sri Lanka's polyethnic social system, he asserts that this procedure is "foreign" to Turner's theory. He suggests that I am doing much more than "describing a situation"; according to LaFleur, what I have in mind is a "blueprint for Sri Lanka's future." He alleges that I seek to define the religious priorities of Hindus and

Buddhists for them (pp. 280–81). Yet Turner has observed the integrative functions of pilgrimage. While the unity created at pilgrimage sites is fragile, and tends to dissolve when pilgrims return home, Turner notes that, over time, pilgrimages create a religious unity that transcends political boundaries. The Islamic *hadj* is an obvious example. Turner argues that pilgrimages “have a stabilizing function in regard to both local and international relations within a system of shared religious values” (Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* [Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1974], p. 175). Indeed, pilgrimages typically play such a role, as the evidence from India and elsewhere suggests. The crucial question for scholarship is not whether Kataragama *can* play a role in creating a sense of religious unity in Sri Lanka, but rather why it is that it does *not* play such a role today. In short, what I had in mind when I wrote the essay was not a “blueprint for Sri Lanka’s future,” but knowledge of the relevant literature.

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A Clarification

As Mary B. Rankin’s review of *China from the 1911 Revolution to Liberation* (*JAS* 38, no. 2 [February 1979]: 331–32), makes plain, but perhaps not sufficiently plain to the unsuspecting reader, this book is the second in a series of three volumes in English which have been translated from a series of four volumes in French. In the process of reorganization for this purpose, the first part of the present volume down to 1921 is from the French volume of which I was co-author, but the remainder of the present volume after 1921 is from a French volume with which I had no connection.

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A Reply to Professor Wang

C. H. Wang’s criticism of my book, *Chinese Theories of Literature*, in his review article (*JAS* 38, no. 3 [May 1979]) shows a strong streak of historicism, the limitations of which I intend to discuss in a forthcoming book. For the time being, I shall make only a few brief comments. It is anachronistic to attribute to an ancient author ideas that he could not have had, but not anachronistic to describe in one’s own terms what he said. Interpretation, by its very nature, entails “translating” an author’s words into different terms; otherwise all interpretations would be either impossible or tautological. When T. S. Eliot was asked what he meant by “Lady, three white leopards sat under a juniper-tree,” he replied by repeating the line. Eliot the poet had the privilege to do so, but Eliot the critic could not have. If we had to interpret an ancient author in the terminology of his own age, then we would have to describe the measurements of a Chou bronze not in centimeters or inches but in Chou *ch’ih*. Neither do I think it anachronistic to criticize an ancient author for what appears to be faulty reasoning. Of course I did not criticize the author of the “Major Preface” for failing to observe my categories, of which he had never heard, but for expressing several different views of poetry without explaining how they could be reconciled.

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