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The Female Circumcision Controversy: An Anthropological Perspective. Ellen Greunbaum

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Book Notes

Alan Swinglewood, *A Short History of Sociological Theory*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000. \$65.00 hardcover, \$24.95 papercover.

Amazingly comprehensive for such a short history, this book addresses the fundamental concerns of sociological thought from its roots in Greek philosophy to current discourses and debates in the field. The first part of the book reviews selective features of classical sociology. This includes discussions of the problems of industrialization and modernization and how positivism helped sociologists address these issues. Overviews of the works of Karl Marx and Emile Durkheim follow with references to their influences and key ideas on sociological thought. Variants of Marxism that emerged after Marx's death are also examined.

The second part of the book links classical sociological thought to modern sociology. Beginning with functionalism, it reviews the key features of the discipline in the twentieth century. Included are readable overviews of ideas about symbolic interaction, structuralism, and post-structuralism. The problems of agency and structure which have been debated in the discipline since its origins are also reviewed. Singlewood also discusses the relevance of post-modern thinking to sociology. This discussion leads to a useful examination of the new social movements that currently affect the discipline.

The book's greatest strength lies in its ability to integrate classical sociological thought into a discussion of contemporary issues in the discipline. The clear writing and breadth of the book will help both beginning and advanced students of sociology gain a greater understanding of theory. For this reason, it deserves to be widely prescribed.

Ellen Greunbaum, *The Female Circumcision Controversy: An Anthropological Perspective*. Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 2000. \$55 hardcover, \$24.95 papercover.

It is only in recent years that the practice of female circumcision in parts of Africa and the Middle East has become generally known and predictably, it has been widely condemned. It has

severe health implications both in terms of its immediate consequences for the young girls who are subjected to the operation, but also in later life when women, and particularly those who have experienced infibulation, often suffer medical complications. Its role in maintaining patriarchal and sexual domination over women has also been stressed, particularly in feminist writing on the subject. There seems to be no ground for justifying a practice that many regard as a barbaric ritual.

Yet, as Ellen Greunbaum's extremely informative and balanced book suggests, the issue is very complicated. Written from an anthropological perspective, the book presents an analysis which draws extensively on the interpretations of the very women who have been subjected to the operation. It reveals the diverse functions which the practice serves and the way it is perceived and interpreted by women themselves. It also draws attention to the hypocritical way Westerners condemn the genital mutilation of girls but have no qualms about the fact that boys are also subjected to genital mutilation not only in Africa but in many other parts of the world, including the United States. However, Greunbaum does not offer an apologetic and instead shows how an appreciation of the cultural, economic, familial and political functions of female circumcision can lead to reforms that will be accepted. Indeed, her book has positive implications for policy and makes important recommendations that can effectively address the challenge of eradicating a deeply entrenched but harmful practice. In addition to its sensitivity, the book's optimism about the prospect of reform is encouraging.

Stephen Castles and Alastair Davidson, *Citizenship and Migration: Globalization and the Politics of Belonging*. New York: Routledge, 2000. \$85.00 hardcover, \$22.95 papercover.

Much has been written over the last decade about globalization and its adverse effects on people's well-being. Much of the literature has focused on the way globalization has undermined the sovereignty of nation states and drawn them into a world capitalist system that, it is claimed, deprives governments of the ability to regulate economic activities to their own national advantage, and that of their citizens.

Writing within this framework, Castles and Davidson focus on the political ramifications of globalization and particularly on