

Culture



T.O. BEIDELMAN, *Colonial Evangelism: A Socio-Historical Study of an East African Mission at the Grassroots*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1982. 273 pages, US \$29.95 (cloth), US \$10.00 (paper)

John Barker

Volume 3, Number 1, 1983

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1084178ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1084178ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Canadian Anthropology Society / Société Canadienne d'Anthropologie (CASCA), formerly/anciennement Canadian Ethnology Society / Société Canadienne d'Ethnologie

ISSN

0229-009X (print)

2563-710X (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Barker, J. (1983). Review of [T.O. BEIDELMAN, *Colonial Evangelism: A Socio-Historical Study of an East African Mission at the Grassroots*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1982. 273 pages, US \$29.95 (cloth), US \$10.00 (paper)]. *Culture*, 3(1), 143–144. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1084178ar>

Tous droits réservés © Canadian Anthropology Society / Société Canadienne d'Anthropologie (CASCA), formerly/anciennement Canadian Ethnology Society / Société Canadienne d'Ethnologie, 1983

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

Érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

sion of nationhood — it introduced me to issues that I now have little excuse for not following up.

Part Three moves closer to the individual (*contra* institution); discussion centres upon symbols, styles and stereotyping, and it is firmly stressed how “ethnic identity at its core involves negotiation within constraints” (p. 214). On symbols, the author stays close to Abner Cohen and I found her (which is not to say Cohen) rather dull; but she is decidedly more interesting in her remarks about the importance of style over tradition (p. 147) and of stereotypes as “programs for action” (pp. 158-59). These matters are also kept in focus for a while through her own Zapotec (especially Juchitan) field data (pp. 169-83). A bonus of this discussion — and of ethnicity as process: the issue that we should never take leave of — is the way it is related to Rosabeth Kanter’s research into tokenism or “token” persons (pp. 195-200).

Finally, Part Four is a short concluding chapter called “Myth & Reality”. I find it flawed, epistemologically. It opens on a misplaced note of despair about how “separating the myth from the reality seems a hopeless task” (p. 219), as though the one should be divorced of reality and the other uncontaminated by myth — and it is ethnicity that we are investigating. The blight of such literal-minded positivism also affects the discussion (very summary) of ethnicity and religious movements, ethnicity and class: here it is as though they are ‘rival’ forces that exclude each other, instead of different rhetorics of value and different principles of aggregation which can be found in various combinations.

What of the book as a whole? Considering the amount of attention we, in anthropology, pay to ethnicity these days, our writings rest upon an alarmingly narrow selective base of theory — it is common for a reference to Fredrick Barth or Abner Cohen to suffice as the sole navigating light; also alarming is our small measure of familiarity with issues (and comparative data, for that matter) handled by political scientists. I am saying that the anthropological treatment of ethnicity today should include a cross-disciplinary dimension, as well as the cross-cultural one which has traditionally distinguished our discipline. The present book goes some way in putting this right: Anya Peterson Royce informs us over a relatively wide register.

But it takes some determination to stay with her to the end: the enterprise that fired her imagination (pp. 1-13) does not really come off. Power, perception and purpose — those three key concepts — amount to so-much ‘scaffolding’: every writer needs some while ‘building’ his (her) book but should it be left there for readers to scramble over?

Treatment of those key “contrasts” turns out to be rather flat. Intellectually, the book is on the timid (over-orthodox) side. But to write about what I believe could have been tackled, would be to put aside reviewing the book that is...

As an introductory text — which I suspect is something rather less grand than the contribution the author herself had in mind — it is more acceptable; and it is as a textbook that its compression — and its statements of basics and its ‘modules’ of ethnography — is a defensible design. But, in that case, it is important students be told that scholars such as Evans-Pritchard and Erving Goffman (unusual for him to be pushed off front-stage) had more than a bit to do with ideas that are here identified with a generation that followed them.

T.O. BEIDELMAN, *Colonial Evangelism: A Socio-Historical Study of an East African Mission at the Grassroots*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1982. 273 pages, US \$29.95 (cloth), US \$10.00 (paper).

By John Barker
University of British Columbia

Missionaries have been by far the largest single group of Westerners to live in close proximity to peoples of cultural traditions alien to their own, particularly during the past two hundred years. It is therefore surprising that, given the obvious importance of understanding the work of missionaries in any detailed assessment of change in Third World countries, so little has been written about missions at the local level. In *Colonial Evangelism* T.O. Beidelman attempts to fill this gap by documenting some aspects of the mutual adjustment of a mission and an African people to each other over time.

Members of the Church Missionary Society (C.M.S.), an Anglican organization, began to set up stations amongst the Kaguru people in 1879 in what was soon to become the German colony of Tanganyika (now Tanzania). Beidelman gives a brief account of the early fortunes of the mission and its subsequent development in the context of a colonial society. His chief concern, however, is to set out an analysis of the everyday activities and problems of a small isolated mission. Among other things, he discusses staffing and funding problems in the mission, the participation of missionaries in “secular” social activities (education and medicine), and the attitudes of missionaries towards traditional

African culture. Most of his analysis is based upon a careful reading of letters and reports from the Ukaguru missionaries deposited in the C.M.S. archives in London. Beidelman also provides a capsule ethnography of the Kaguru and a fairly detailed description of the activities and organization of the local mission in the late 1950's. These are both based upon fieldwork he conducted in 1957-58.

I found the book to have a rather hit or miss quality. Beidelman has several interesting observations to make, especially about the relations between the missionaries and the Kaguru, but he rarely follows these up. For example, he several times alludes to the importance of Africans engaged in mission work as mediators between the Europeans and the Kaguru but gives few actual instances. In fact Beidelman has little to say about any missionaries but the European ones. This study could have benefitted greatly had oral testimonies from both missionaries and Kaguru been recorded and analysed. As a result of his heavy dependence on the C.M.S. documents, the author too often is unable to tell the reader whether a certain policy was enforced by the mission or not and what the consequences were when it was. The lack of any discussion of the nature or development of practices and beliefs derived from the Christian teachings of the missionaries among the Kaguru also lessens the value of the study. Considering that this is a "grassroots" study, Beidelman has surprisingly little to say about Kaguru attitudes, initiatives and responses to the mission. The perspective here is essentially Eurocentric, even if unsympathetic to the missionaries.

Beidelman must also be faulted for his peculiar use of the historical data. Far too often he cites documents to illustrate policies or viewpoints with no consideration of period, personality, the purpose of the document or the circumstances behind its creation. The author also shows a proclivity to alternate freely between the past and present tenses in his descriptions of the fundamental beliefs of the C.M.S. and its supporters. It is not clear to the reader, as the result of this practice, whether the C.M.S. missionaries still hold to the views of their nineteenth century founders or whether there has been change through time. Finally, a thirty year gap in the historic record, between the 1920's and 1957, is not accounted for or even acknowledged.

Despite these weaknesses *Colonial Evangelism* contains several valuable and interesting insights, particularly concerning the day to day operations of the mission organisation. It is to be hoped that these and other observations made in this book will be profitably followed up by more systematic and thorough studies in the future.

Marc AUGÉ, *Le génie du paganisme*, Paris, Gallimard, 1982. 92 FF.

Par Eric Schwimmer
Université Laval

Ce livre est plus large, plus classique que le reste de l'œuvre de Marc Augé, même si le reste de cette œuvre est toujours brillant et plein de réflexions intéressantes. Il constitue aussi l'une des meilleures introductions à l'anthropologie de la religion et sûrement la meilleure de celles écrites en français. Les étudiants auront toutefois besoin d'un enseignant pour expliciter les références parfois trop brèves à certains concepts-clefs, ceux de Weber véhiculés par Bourdieu par exemple. L'auteur, d'autre part, réussit très bien à expliquer — même aux non-spécialistes et aux débutants — le problème préalable à toute anthropologie de la religion : comment penser l'universalité de la religion et la diversité des systèmes religieux.

Augé évite, pour l'essentiel, l'esprit de la polémique. Il se contente de laisser toutes les théories et toutes les réflexions coexister paisiblement, et d'accorder à chacune sa place légitime. Comme beaucoup d'autres œuvres des dernières années, *Le génie du paganisme* veut pourtant analyser en profondeur les présuppositions des observateurs qui ont si souvent déformé, sans le savoir, l'interprétation des religions non-occidentales. Car l'anthropologie de la religion n'échappe presque jamais à certaines attitudes qui se veulent scientifiques, ou objectives, alors qu'elles résultent en fait de l'éducation religieuse de l'observateur, éducation trop souvent oubliée ou sous-estimée, même si elle entre partout dans les analyses. Comment s'en libérer?

Ici, comme toujours, la libération exige une meilleure connaissance de soi-même. Il y a en effet une sorte de dialectique entre la connaissance de soi et la connaissance de l'autre. L'œuvre d'Augé est savamment construite pour donner au lecteur cette orientation essentielle. Quand l'auteur parle du christianisme de la nouvelle droite, ou des théories supposément universelles de la religion comme celle de René Girard, il veut surtout démontrer que ces théories occultent le problème de la diversité. Ce problème est essentiellement celui d'accepter la possibilité que le paganisme soit *vrai* dans le même sens où on pense, consciemment ou inconsciemment, que les religions monothéistes sont vraies. Car même l'intellectuel qui se considère comme athée, ou non croyant, a souvent l'idée que le monothéisme est quand même plus *rationnel* que le paganisme. Le projet essentiel d'Augé est donc d'établir la rationalité du paganisme.