

## Culture



**Richard HANDLER, *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Québec*, Madison, Wisconsin, The University of Wisconsin Press, 1988. 217 pages, \$15.75 (paperback)**

Gerald L. Gold

Volume 8, Number 2, 1988

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1085925ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1085925ar>

[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

Gold, G. (1988). Review of [Richard HANDLER, *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Québec*, Madison, Wisconsin, The University of Wisconsin Press, 1988. 217 pages, \$15.75 (paperback)]. *Culture*, 8(2), 108–109. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1085925ar>

Tous droits réservés © Canadian Anthropology Society / Société Canadienne d'Anthropologie (CASCA), formerly/anciennement Canadian Ethnology Society / Société Canadienne d'Ethnologie, 1988

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/>

Rodman's general approach is historical and highly personalized. The second chapter, entitled *Fieldwork*, recounts Rodman's own history in Vanuatu and the conditions surrounding her research. The third chapter discusses the role of fish in the native cuisine. The fourth chapter outlines Vanuatu's history from first European contact to 1985. The fifth and sixth chapters focus on planners' hopes regarding fisheries development. The seventh and eight present the two case studies of actual projects.

The last two chapters reiterate previous points while assessing, equivocally, whether the projects should be considered successes or failures. Using the criterion of persistence, which looms paramount in the minds of VFDP officials, the two projects would qualify as successes, for they have managed to keep going over two or three years. Similarly, if one took the native viewpoint and asked only if new economic opportunities had been created, then again the projects are successful. If, however, one were to judge on the basis of a realistic accounting of profits, then the answer would almost certainly be negative, for the persistence of the projects seems to depend heavily on government subsidy and volunteer workers. Although the introduction of deep water fishing techniques and subsidized equipment has provided Vanuatu villagers a new means of obtaining cash, they show very little interest in becoming "full time" fishermen. Fishing remains, like copra, part of a simple commodity economy.

In sum, Rodman's vivid and personalized writing style make this an excellent ethnography for introductory anthropology classes. I would also recommend it for courses on contemporary Oceanic cultures or Third World development. Maritime anthropologists are likely to be a bit disappointed, however, given the book's title, by the scant attention (only five pages, pp. 70-75) given to fish ecology, fishing strategy, and technical details on handline fishing.

---

Richard HANDLER, *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Québec*, Madison, Wisconsin, The University of Wisconsin Press, 1988. 217 pages, \$15.75 (paperback).

by Gerald L. Gold  
York University

This study is of particular interest to Canadian anthropology as an "ethnography of two discourses that feed off each other": the discourse of Québec nationalism and that of Québec social science. In practice, this book is primarily a study of national-

ism and deals only peripherally with Québec social science. Its vitality originates with Handler's 1977 fieldwork and from an imaginative analysis of texts, ranging from programmatic statements which Lionel Groulx penned sixty years ago to the Charter of the French Language and other documents produced by the Parti Québécois (P.Q.) government.

From the outset, Handler demonstrates that ethnic nationalism in Québec is based on the premise that Québécois culture is a "bounded unit" and that the Québec nation is depicted in nationalist rhetoric as a collective individual. In this objectification, history is reinterpreted and a Québec peasantry emerges in the structural turmoil of the 19th century. The reader is asked to accept the primacy of this primordial theme and there is no consideration of any situational context of nationalism or identity. In this way, the "negative vision" of a perpetually threatened "collective individual" can be found in both the writings of Groulx, René Lévesque and in the statements of informants. To these nationalists, Federalism and English-Canadians represent contamination, danger and imprecision - an aberrance from the "natural" or "normal" nation.

From the collective individual, Handler adeptly turns to the creation of the "true Québécois culture" by examining the objectification of tradition in rural Québec folk dancing. The folk society of French-Canadian social science (which somehow ends with Rioux, Guindon and Garigue) is demonstrated to be different from the Folk Society of Miner and Redfield. Like Garigue, Handler questions the appropriateness of the concept of a folk society as applied to Québec, and he shows graphically how Barbeau and Rioux created their folk societies out of a context of continuous change. Since the discourse of Québec social science is quintessential to Handler's thesis, it is disappointing to see that this discussion does not introduce Luc Lacourcière and the political and intellectual significance of the Archives de Folklore at Université Laval. A more serious lacuna is that Handler does not account for the historical materialist perspective of Québec as a peasant society that was introduced by Breton, Bernier and others during the years when the P. Q. held power.

A denouement is Handler's ethnography of Québec cultural policy. Primary documents and interviews are used to knit links between pre-1960 cultural policies and the rise of the Ministère des Affaires culturelles. Though this discussion is effective, it should be placed in the context of the P.Q.'s rhetoric of social development. The first ads that mention the P.Q. to farmers in Kamouraska County,

emphasize social change that had not been delivered by Liberal reforms. Nowhere in this study is there a discussion of the dissatisfaction that temporarily dethroned the reforming Liberal Party in 1966 and which eventually unseated the P.Q. Though there is a brief consideration of opposing ideologies (Trudeau's Federalism and Multiculturalism), Handler's model does not account for what Rioux identifies as the dialectics of Québec nationalism, and a reader may still be looking for the dynamic of historical change after accepting that a concept of boundedness cross-cuts all Québec nationalism.

The ethnography of Québec bureaucracy follows an argument that Handler introduces in his study of the folk society: that the objectification of "total culture" will invariably fail and lead to further fragmentation. From heritage (*patrimoine*), Handler makes a smooth transition to language legislation and the problem of maintaining linguistic purity in a "normal society". Cultural policy is linked with language policy where minorities are also viewed as collectivities or collections of collective individuals.

Though Handler does comment on the collapse of the Québec Church at the outset of the Quiet Revolution, the ease with which he moves from Groulx's French Canada to Lévesque's Québec is disconcerting. While there are ideological and symbolic continuities which link Groulx with Lévesque, and though the P.Q. did salvage Groulx's statue from the basement of the Assemblée nationale, the differences between the two are as significant as the similarities. Lévesque's Québec would have been an anathema to Groulx and Lévesque's use of television contrasts with the 'appeals' of Groulx to an elite audience. Moreover, as Moreux demonstrates in her ethnographies of St. Hilaire and Louiseville, the consumers of mass media were ideologically divided by the changes that followed the Quiet Revolution.

This book is one of the most stimulating and thought-provoking anthropological studies of Québec in recent years. Though there may be shortcomings in the ethnography and in the ambitious coverage of the volume, it is nonetheless essential reading. Handler's conclusion is thought-provoking when he suggests that cultural objectification characterizes all nationalism and that the bureaucratic "appropriation of culture" will invariably lead to its further fragmentation. These far-reaching conclusions will influence other studies, as the techniques of critical anthropology extend anthropological inquiry from the microcosm of region and community.

---

Harriet ROSENBERG, *A Negotiated World: Three Centuries of Change in a French Alpine Community*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1988. 234 pages, \$30.00.

by Irene Silverblatt  
*University of Connecticut*

The "new critical" anthropology, presently berating the discipline for ignoring the past of those under study, should examine its own. It is ironic that many discovering the virtues of historical dimensions and global intersections appear unaware of anthropology's significant, if minority, tradition which conducted research along the lines now receiving praise. Harriet Rosenberg's remarkable study of a French peasantry's situated engagement with national and international forces, *A Negotiated World*, constitutes a timely contribution to this anthropological practice.

Dr. Rosenberg chooses an apt title for her three hundred year panorama of Abries, a village in the French Alps. Contrary to some anthropological expectations, Abriesois did not simply bend to outside forces of state and economy: rather, they actively engaged those institutions dominated by outsiders with varying degrees of success, and actively participated in creating expanded or contracted possibilities of living. By taking the long view, Rosenberg is able to challenge received notions of peasant character that are grounded in contemporary prejudices. As she reminds us in her introductory chapter, "Peasant poverty or wealth, political mobilization or passivity are not givens. Rather they are aspects of peasant society requiring historically contextualized explanations." (p. 3). By foregrounding the precise historical contexts in which Abriesois negotiated their futures, Rosenberg un-masks the presumptions of inevitability underlying both the progressive trajectory of modernization theory and the teleology of dependency theory.

Abries's participation in the momentous proceedings of modernity - statemaking and capitalist expansion - concerns Dr. Rosenberg. To capture their significance she takes us back to Abries under the Old Regime, and tarnishes some cherished peasant stereotypes. The Abriesois exercised considerable control over their economic and political destinies. For example, as part of a coalition of neighboring villages, Abries negotiated a favorable political character vis-à-vis the Crown. During that time their agricultural and pastoral endeavors supported a population over ten times the size of today's, while traditional community mechanisms restricted internal