

OXFORD RESEARCH IN SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

**ABSTRACTS OF THESES IN SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY
FOR WHICH HIGHER DEGREES WERE AWARDED
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JONATHAN E. ARENSEN, *Aspects of Language and Society among the Murle of Sudan*. D. Phil.

This thesis takes a fresh look at Murle society by using the Murle language as the focus of the discussion. I assert that there is a close correlation between any given language and the people who speak it. Therefore an in-depth analysis of a language and how it is used will reveal insights into the society which are not readily available by other means.

The thesis begins by discussing the origins and ethnicity of the Murle people; relying heavily on linguistic data for its evidence. It then focuses on how basic lexical terms are tied to experience. Taking these lexical terms as a starting-point, it shows how language can be expanded and used metaphorically. This reveals much about how the Murle people perceive, organize and categorize their world. A study of Murle grammar and discourse follows, and these show further aspects of categorization and Murle thought.

Having laid a background of what can be learned through language, the thesis proceeds to the analysis of Murle tales. The various features of Murle language previously described are thus seen in a natural context and the meanings of these tales and their relationship to Murle society are explained. The thesis then moves into the study of Murle religion. The terminology used in this sphere is both abstract and dense with meaning. Using techniques found earlier in the thesis, various aspects of Murle religion are discussed. Having gained an understanding of the parameters of these religious terms, there follows a discussion on the translation of the Bible into the Murle language, showing both the possibilities and difficulties of taking indigenous Murle language and religious terminology and using these in such a translation.

Overall the thesis proposes that the use of in-depth language analysis in an anthropological discussion gives an important added dimension to the study of a given people. This approach expands the understanding of Murle society and helps to show it in a fresh way—hopefully more as the Murle people themselves see it.

JOAN F. BURKE, *The Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur in Lower Zaïre: A Social and Historical Study*. D. Phil.

The subject of this thesis is the Congregation of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur in Lower Zaïre, and the social reconstruction of the Catholic sisterhood by African members. The historical section, based on published and archival sources, traces the early history of the congregation from the arrival of the sisters in the Congo Free State in 1894. It describes the early work of the sisters with women and young girls, and the first three attempts of Africans to become Catholic sisters in Lower Congo. The study indicates some of the factors which promoted the development of a Congolese Church in the colony rather than one that replicated the Church in the Belgian *métropole*. The missionary policy stressed the Africanization of Church personnel, especially its ministers. The political 'policy of authenticity', promulgated by President Mobutu in the early 1970s, reinforced these tendencies and encouraged the indigenization of the Church.

The ethnographic section, based on eight years of first-hand field observation, examines the transformation of the Catholic sisterhood by examining first the self-perceptions of the Kongo sisters (Ki-kongo speakers from Lower Zaïre), and then patterns and social processes in different community settings. The ethnographer shows how the Zaïrean members of the congregation reconstructed the sisterhood by drawing on experience and models derived from: (1) Catholic mission practices, (2) expatriate sisters, (3) their Kongo villages, (4) post-colonial influences emanating from the urban political centre.

The researcher argues that studies of this kind need to take as their starting-point the self-perceptions of the people themselves and carefully record coexisting contradictory models and internal conflicts. These tensions indicate domains of

continuing negotiation and adjustment within the group to their developing identities. A methodology that respects persons as the active subjects of their own history has broad implications for studies of minority peoples and colonial regimes, as well as for 'mission ethnographies'.

SIAN EIRA JAY, Shamans, Priests and the Cosmology of the Ngaju Dayak of Central Kalimantan. D. Phil.

The introductory chapter of the thesis outlines the aims of the study and gives a brief synopsis of the contributions that have already been made by scholars who have worked with the Ngaju Dayak. It also gives a very brief account of how the fieldwork was conducted. The second chapter goes on to outline in greater detail the geographical and cultural region involved and to discuss the literature covering this region, and to discuss the recent developments in religious attitudes which have a bearing on the study. The third chapter outlines the social organization of the Ngaju Dayak, being divided up into settlement, kinship, and status and rank.

Chapter four describes the creation myth of the Ngaju and analyses its symbolism, and relates it to the current religious practices of the Kaharingan Ngaju. It is based upon the official account of the mythology published by the Ngaju. This book, the *Panaturan*, has not been discussed before.

Chapter five analyses the concepts of 'soul' and spirit among the Ngaju, the various sections discussing different aspects of the concept and describing the implications that these concepts have for religious belief and practice. It also takes account of Christian and Hindu ideas that have influenced the modern Ngaju's understanding of these concepts.

Following an introduction and précis of the literature, chapter six discusses the priests and the ceremonies at which they officiate, and describes how they become priests. This is followed by a description of uncontrolled possession, the role of shamans and their relationship with their familiar spirits, and their curing ceremonies. The final sections describe the career of the shaman, and the ceremony whereby they assume the role.

WILFRED VAN EYEN, Urban Culture and the Rise of the 'Basilimu': A Social History of Kigali and Butare in Rwanda, 1966-1976. D. Phil.

This thesis, based upon fieldwork undertaken between 1972 and 1976 in Rwanda's two major towns, explores certain informal, political, socio-economic and ideological aspects of a new identity among the educated layers of the population known as the *basilimu*. As a category they hardly fitted in the conventional frameworks of urban-rural, ethnic, or class distinctions, yet they were central to the local urban culture and played a crucial role nationwide during an important period in the country's history.

Part one, outlining the context, emphasizes Rwanda's uniqueness—a land of scattered settlement and negligible urbanization, but nevertheless Africa's most densely populated country. Reference is made to relevant historical themes, and the *basilimu*'s sudden political significance during the upheavals preceding the 1973 military coup is analysed.

Part two describes the urban beer trade: the economic and socio-cultural spearhead of the *basilimu*'s breakthrough into a foreign-dominated urban world, and the first republic's main channel for 'informal' politics—the very success of which betrayed Rwanda's economic predicament and the widening gap between *basilimu* and peasantry.

As shown in part three, increased belief in sorcery since the 'time of politics' was an important ideological element in the *basilimu*'s efforts to bridge this gap through a 'return' to peasant traditions in the face of adversity. Yet these very traditions, in denying the ancestral spirits any role in countering modern sorcery, had become largely symbolic of peasant impotence, deepening the victim's ideological and personal crisis, and leaving only initiation into the Kubandwa cult as a potential rescue.

Part four deals with certain socio-cultural, economic and urbanizational reforms under the second republic which, by further fostering *basilimu* identity and the creation of a genuine class among the *basilimu* in town, enlisted support from the educated for a policy of national cohesion focused once again upon the peasantry. The impact of these changes upon beliefs in sorcery was unknown, yet even though economic disparities grew and Kigali's expansion was actively promoted, they certainly increased the regime's stability.