

vast anthropological theoretical literature on the subject of misfortune and ritual studies. In chapter 2 the author describes the passage from an empirically stated anomaly or pathology to the stage of considering it as a form of misfortune. While health is an element of the total harmony in which human beings live in the universe, illness is a form of chaos that disrupts the harmony. Thus, for the Bassari (and other peoples) the issue of illness includes another dimension perceived in the West as “religious/spiritual.” Western readers are reminded that a system of symbolic notions plays a significant role here. For the Bassari illness has also a social dimension. Finally, the author tackles the problem of linking misfortune with evil, reminding the reader about differences in African and Western perception of the problem. For the Bassari the moral dilemma is not considered as a choice between good and evil but between life and death! They treat all that destroys life as evil, at the same time trying to find out to what extent a person attacked by evil is responsible for bringing it about.

Cultural context plays a significant role in defining how people perceive and explain misfortune. The book shows multidimensionality of the problem presenting misfortune understood as an effect of an unpaid debt (chapter 3), as a result of taboo transgression (chapter 4), as a sign of choice (chapter 5), and misfortune due to aggression (chapter 6). In all of these chapters the author presents a detailed description of rituals performed in order to cope with misfortune, or to alleviate its effects. Needless to say the author observed all of them personally, giving the reader firsthand material. In chapter 7 the author tries to capture the most elusive aspect of the whole problem, writing at first about pragmatism and meaning of rituals. He, then, shows ritual as a process and draws the reader’s attention to rituals’ virtuality that allows for preserving the structures of ritual while offering possibilities for creativity in forms. Finally, the multidimensionality of ritual practice is stressed.

The theoretical chapters are very informative. However, this strength of the book turns at times into its weakness when the reader starts wondering about the purpose of referring to so many authors and about the way all these references are going to be applied to the material from Togo. It has to be stressed that the application is eventually done, and done very well. Still, the impression remains – particularly in chapter 7 – that the author tries to catch too many birds at once.

The challenge posed by the topic was augmented by differences in worldview between many Africans and Westerners. Throughout the book the author is aware that a fair treatment of the topic can only be guaranteed with paying full attention to these differences and alerting the reader to them. He successfully achieves that goal.

Generally, the book deserves a high praise and it should be of interest not only to anthropologists/Africanists because of its extensive and informative presentation of the original material from the fieldwork among the Bassari but also to all those who focus on ritual studies, philosophers, and theologians who concentrate on the problem of misfortune/evil.

Stanisław Grodź

Pinxten, Rik, and Ellen Preckler (eds.): *Racism in Metropolitan Areas*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2006. 190 pp. ISBN 978-1-84545-089-2. (Culture and Politics / Politics and Culture, 3) Price: \$ 22.50

This collection of essays is third in a series of publications on the relationship of culture and politics. It is based on papers presented at a conference on cities and racism, held in Brussels (the introduction neglects to mention when) and sponsored by the Evens Foundation. The conference’s – and this book’s – goal was to further the dialogue between scholars, policymakers, businesspeople, and people from the media and art worlds. The collaboration of science and political practice is also illustrated by the persons of the two editors: Pinxten is a professor of anthropology at Ghent University, Seckler is referred to as a “junior interface officer,” working as a liaison between the city of Ghent and youth movements.

Let me begin by stating that providing a framework for the collaboration between social scientists and policymakers is evidently a noble effort and potentially very important – if it really has a chance of making a difference in the world of policy, is a different matter and beyond the scope of this review – as is the exchange between social-scientific theory and political practice in general, and as are the issues of racism in contemporary societies and the social role of metropolitan areas in this and many other respects. For these reasons alone, the book deserves praise simply for the fact that it has been written. Regrettably, however, this seems to be already the best thing that can be said about it.

But let us first come back to the description of the book’s structure. After two brief pages of introduction, the volume is organized in two parts: the first, called “Disempowering through Racism,” presents nine essays that focus on the description and analysis of racism; the second, “Empowering to Combat Racism,” presents nine more essays that aim to describe strategies to improve racial relations, counter racism, and empower disadvantaged social groups. While those two foci are indeed roughly reflected in the respective sections’ articles, the internal selection of papers appears to be completely at random. The intended dialogue between theory and policy evidently falls short of any expectation for the simple reason alone that only one third of the essays is by others than social scientists. Even the “scientific” papers, some written by well-known anthropologists and many raising interesting points, are mostly just the length of conference presentations and for this reason preclude a sophisticated engagement with the issues at stake.

This leads to the main problem of this book: as conference volumes go, the papers are necessarily diverse, but in this case, it is impossible to discover any common thread or systematic framework that tries to bind these diverse contributions together in some way. Both racism and the study of metropolitan areas – the latter theme is actually hardly theorized at all in the book (claims in the introduction notwithstanding that it is supposed to be one of the book’s foci), which leaves the reader wondering if this is a selection of case studies that just happen to be addressing urban contexts, or if there is something particu-

lar about racism in such contexts – are very wide-ranging subjects, and no one can seriously expect any single book to do them full justice. In this case, however, the papers appear to be more at random than usual, and while they address a number of very interesting issues, they do so from such a broad variety of regional and sociohistorical contexts (ranging between India, Singapore, Austria, Denmark, Belgium, Great Britain, etc.) that they present nothing but superficial glances at specific cases from a wide array of different angles. Laura Nader makes an effort to identify some common themes in her concluding comments, but one would have expected first of all the editors to identify some key issues and sketch some general framework of approaches in the introduction – and, last but not least, to urge the contributors to make some references to these in their papers. Far from being a dialogue, in the current version scholars and policymakers are simply talking past each other (as usual, one might venture to remark), and neither do the “scientific” two thirds of the papers identify some overarching approaches, which the policymakers could have addressed. It is to be hoped that a dialogue between the two sides took place during the conference – it definitely fails to show in the pages of this book.

So in the end, the reader is left with a rather frustrating experience – and wondering, after all, who the book’s intended audience might be: to the anthropologist, the brief essays neither tell anything new nor present a state-of-the-art overview of how the important issue of racism in metropolitan areas is being investigated by social scientists. To the general reader and, more important, to politicians and policymakers, the contributions are too randomly selected and too specific to provide them with some general ideas of how these issues are viewed from a scientific perspective. The final impression, then, is one of disappointment. The book addresses a highly important issue, which anthropologists – and other social scientists – should be called upon to pay even more attention in the future, but it misses an opportunity to make any clear statement and to demonstrate how the collaboration between scientists and policymakers could work in a joint effort to develop a strategy to combat racist ideologies and politics.

Ingo W. Schröder

Pourcher, Yves : *Politique parade. Pouvoir, charme et séduction.* Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 2007. 238 pp. ISBN 978-2-02-089890-4. Prix : € 17,00

Dans cette splendide galerie de portraits politiques, sélectionnés dans l’histoire contemporaine en fonction du charme, de la grâce ou de la baraka, le guide nous promène avec son crayon laser, sa verve fine et pétillante. Au début, Jean-Paul II et Hassan II ; à la fin : Nicolas, Ségolène, et les autres (dont un trublion). Entre ceux-là : quelques Marchais, Pasqua, Khrouchtchev . . . , coincés parmi des faciès drolatiques ou pétulants. Dès ce début de lecture, je pense avoir retrouvé ma passion de naguère pour la verve de Philippe Alexandre dans “Paysages de campagne” ou dans “Mon livre de cuisine politique” (Paris 1988, Paris 1992).

Je prends Y. Pourcher à rebours en sélectionnant les plus beaux pétards de son feu d’artifice royal et final ! Il ne sait trop comment parler des partisans roses : royalistes ; que non ! ségolistes, ça sonnerait comme gaulistes ; ségolénistes, ça rimerait avec lepénistes. Gazelle ? Girafe au milieu d’éléphants ? “Immaculée conception du pouvoir ? Nouvelle madone du politique” (225) ? Peu importe ! Wagner a bien composé, vous souvient-il, “Le Hollandais volant”, traduit en français par “Le Vaisseau fantôme”. Oh, le bel air de Senta ! Mais rien à voir avec le Chœur des esclaves de “Nabucco” entonné par un baryton, géniteur de Marine ! En face ou à contre jour, “un Bonaparte impatient comme tous les Bonapartes . . . , Sarkozy agite, secoue, provoque et tire” (227). “Pendant ces mois de campagne, il nous faut retrouver le sens du rêve, de l’espoir, de l’illusion et de la grâce. Croire ! Un peu, rien qu’un peu. Le verdict tombera” (229). Que mon lecteur l’ait entendu ce verdict avant d’avoir lu l’ouvrage, ne signifie nullement qu’il n’ait pas à céder au charme d’un Y. Pourcher, ni dogmatique, ni partisan, ni pétard mouillé, simplement solide dans son discours et décapant dans son humour.

Sans me laisser émouvoir par le crâne de Barthez ou par le cinéma de Reagan, je livre simplement un florilège. Indira Gandhi : La différence avec mon père ? Moi, je suis impitoyable ! (219), Chirac : “un bel appétit : Ah, la Corrèze, la mairie de Paris, le RPR, etc.” (228). Le Pen, chef de secte ou grand gourou, “la seule vedette de son carnaval électoral” (205). Chevènement, pied sur terre et tête dans les étoiles (200) qui annonce : Chirospin, le destin programmé ! et qui stigmatise le Chouan à la voix aigrette : De Villiers (191). Mamère, lui, en janvier 2002, dépeint : Jospin, l’équilibriste ; Chirac, le VRP du modèle pompidolien industrialisé ; Le Pen, le candidat inoxydable du fascisme à la française ; Arlette, la candidate toujours présente depuis 1917 (198) . . . Ailleurs, Madame Laguiller brocarde “Rocard dont la réputation d’intelligence vient de ce que personne ne comprend ce qu’il dit” (184). De belles sorties en noir et blanc : Noir comme le Michel de Lyon, Blanc comme le Jacques de la Lozère (cf. Pourcher, *Votez tous pour moi.* Paris 2004) ! Ici et ailleurs, des présidents Kennedy, Mitterand, Clinton sont des charmeurs artistes (150) ! Leçon à Jean Lacouture entendue de Mitterand : “Vous devriez savoir, vous qui avez fait de l’histoire, que la politique, c’est une affaire de bande” (143). Pour Kennedy, parlant à Pierre Salinger après son élection de 1960, “La télévision est une boîte sacrée. Nouvelle huile sainte, elle coule sur la tête des heureux élus. Elle consacre, au moins pour un temps” (138).

Je joue à vous offrir des amuse-gueule, mais le plat de résistance est substantiel. Je pars de la fin. “La séduction n’est pas une arme exclusivement féminine. Chez un homme, on l’appelle le charme”, disait Françoise Giroud (218). Le charme joue sur trois pôles, selon Yves Pourcher : l’en-haut qui gratifie et donne raison à l’histoire, l’en-soi de la passion et de l’acharnement, l’en-nous des groupes et communautés désignant leur chef (218). Soit le triangle de sustentation du charme : les symboles, l’artiste, le public (6).