

Amit, Vered [ed.] (2004) *Biographical Dictionary of Social and Cultural Anthropology*.

London: Routledge, pp.399-400

Parkin, David

b. 5 November 1940, Watford, UK

Although Parkin's main contribution to social anthropology has been his long-term fieldwork among the non-Muslim Giriama and Swahili-speaking Muslims of East Africa, his first fieldwork was among Luo-speaking peoples of Kenya, who had migrated to towns in Uganda and Kenya in the 1950s and 1960s, adapting to the modern urban conditions of late colonialism. Parkin analysed the way in which the Luo polysegmentary lineage system adjusted and reasserted itself in these new contexts. His work was in line with the ethnographies of the Manchester School anthropologists, who sought to understand how the 'indigenous' peoples adapted their social life, customs, and religion, by adjusting their kinship, social organisation, and political institutions to the new settings of urbanisation and industrialisation brought about by colonialism and post-colonialism.

In the late 1960s, Parkin turned his ethnographic interest to the interaction between the inland non-Muslim Giriama of Kenya and the coastal Swahili-speaking Muslims of Kenya and Tanzania. He was the first anthropologist to work among the Giriama and his analyses over four decades have explored the processes through which Giriama and Swahili have interacted with each other while at the same time keeping separate identities. Giriama resisted conversion to Islam and Christianity until recently but their increasing migration to the coastal areas, previously dominated by Swahili, is changing

the relationship between both peoples and the way they construct their mutual identities. Over the last decade Parkin's research has focused on how changing economic conditions in the coastal areas of Kenya and Tanzania have impacted upon the religious and social ideologies of coastal peoples, in which new notions of 'health', 'progress', 'entrepreneurship', and 'political change' play an important role. His interest throughout his work has been on changes in knowledge, practice, and how these are expressed in language.

Currently, Parkin is preparing a monograph on Islam and medicine among the Swahili-speaking peoples. He runs a project on Indian Ocean Studies and is working in collaboration with the new Centre of Migration Policy and Society at Oxford.

Education

BA (Hons) School of Oriental and African Studies, 1962

Ph.D. School of Oriental and African Studies, 1965

Fieldwork

Kampala, Uganda, 1962-4

Kenya, 1966-7, 1968-9, 1977-8

Kenya, 1984, 1985, 1988 (8 months in all)

Kenya and Zanzibar, 1991, 1992, 1993 (4 months in all)

Zanzibar and Pemba, Tanzania, 1995 (2 months)

Zanzibar and Mombasa, Kenya, 1997-8 (2 months)

Zanzibar, 2002 (2 months)

Key Publications

(1969) *Neighbours and Nationals in an African City Ward*, London/Berkeley: Routledge & Kegan Paul/California University Press.

(1972) *Palms, Wine and Witnesses: Public Spirit and Private Gain in an African Farming Community*, San Francisco/London: Chandler (new edn, Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1994).

(1978) *The Cultural Definition of Political Response:*

Lineal Destiny among the Luo of Kenya, London/
New York: Academic Press.

(1991) *Sacred Void: Spatial Images of Work and Ritual
among the Giriama of Kenya*, Cambridge/New
York: Cambridge University Press.

LUÍS BATALHA