

STANLEY R. BARRETT (1938-2021)

In a long and fruitful career, Stan Barrett made substantial contributions to both theory and ethnography. Before his first spell in the field, he had received a BA from Acadia University and an MA in Toronto. After he finished his BA he completed a spell as a secondary school teacher in Nigeria among the Igbo people, sponsored by CUSO (Canadian University Services Overseas), a new organization in the early 1960s. That experience converted him into a social anthropologist. His PhD was completed at Sussex under the supervision of Frederick Bailey, and his doctoral thesis involved a return to Nigeria, accompanied by his wife, Kaye. Their first field trip took place in 1969-1970, including the concluding months of the civil war. He wrote two beautiful short ethnographies about two Yoruba “villages on stilts” on the Atlantic coast. Both of them were occupied by a dissident branch of the Aladura religious movement, the Holy Apostles. One of them, Aiyetoro (“Olowo” in his books), practised communalism in property, and, for a brief while in sexual relations, and abandoned the use of money in internal transactions. Barrett attributed its remarkable economic success in mechanized fishing and other pursuits primarily to its adherence to a communal ideology, although he did not discount the impact of the religious faith of its first charismatic Oba and his disciples. The neighbouring village (“Talika”) which had a more traditional social structure and retained private enterprise, was less successful. All too soon, charisma died along with the economy, when a new generation and a different Oba presided over a return to private enterprise and increased inequality. In “Two Villages on Stilts” (1974) and “The Rise and Fall of an African Utopia” (1977), Barrett raised interesting questions about modernization theory and the cross-cultural validity of the Weber-Tawney hypothesis. Neither of his publishers did a particularly good job marketing these books, but the second is now available on Kindle. In September 2021, just weeks ago, Aiyetoro, threatened by a combination of pollution that has destroyed people’s livelihood as well as by climate change, pleaded for government intervention before the sea swallows its remaining houses.

“The Rebirth of Anthropological Theory” (1984), the first of four books published by University of Toronto Press, attracted more attention. It noted that fashions in anthropological theory were cyclical and advances in the discipline were tentative, and that one reason for this was that social

life is intrinsically messy. The book's major concern was the development of theories that don't emphasize structure at the expense of agency (or agency at the expense of structure). He was wary of structural functionalist theories that stressed equilibrium, and of Lévi-Straussian structuralism which was remote from quotidian social action. Barrett was particularly drawn to the approach of Robert Murphy in the "Dialectics of Social Life," as well as two well-known Manchester School anthropologists who discussed conflicts between norms and reality in social relations when discussing the choices made by social actors, Victor Turner in his early work such as "Schism and Continuity in an African Society," and F. G. Bailey in works such as "Stratagems and Spoils" and "Morality and Expediency." In the conclusions to this book Barrett noted that social anthropologists and sociologists had miserably failed to confront racism as a social fact, a powerful force that could not be dismissed as an epiphenomenon of class. His two subsequent ethnographies constituted his own attempt to rectify that situation.

Barrett's third ethnography, "Is God a Racist" (1987), attracted quite a bit of attention within Canada. Its subject was fascist networks in Canada, one of which, The Western Guard, used a slogan that gave him the title of his book. Barrett infiltrated the organization, and produced a memorable account of its history, its beliefs, and the social characteristics of its adherents. The members of the Guard doubtless observed that he was a powerful speaker, clear, coherent and endowed with a deep bass voice. Shortly after reviews and discussions of the book appeared in the Toronto press, Barrett encountered two of the rougher members of the party in the street. He expected trouble. However, the two men offered no violence, but did express their surprise. They thought he was fair to them, given his very different worldview. However, they were "very disappointed" with him in another way. "What way?," he asked. "We thought you would be our leader." This then was the ironical consequence of undercover anthropology?

Barrett's fourth and last ethnography, "Paradise: Class, Commuters and Ethnicity in Rural Ontario" (1994), was a portrait of social stratification in a small Ontario town he called "Paradise." It was a town formerly dominated by an elite, most of whom belonged to the Protestant Orange Order. More recently, a new population of Torontonians had bought property in Paradise. Some of them commuted to Toronto, even though it took them a few hours each day. Their overt reasons

for moving to Paradise were that they wanted land, the freedom of small-town life, and the ability to keep and exercise a dog. Barrett suggested that racism was an often-covert motivation. Paradise was still solidly white, and the few Caribbean or South Asian families that tried to live there were not made welcome.

As a political anthropologist Barrett was naturally enough interested in the concept of power. He was also suspicious of theoretical approaches that divorced power from its complex social and cultural roots. However, he was wary of strained distinctions between “culture” and “society,” and of approaches that limited culture to “learned behaviour” or ideology. Like some postmodernists, he was suspicious of the deployment of “culture” as a form of “othering.” However, he had limited patience with poststructuralism and postmodernism, and, in particular, he was not enthralled by Foucauldian obsessions with “power” conceived as a form of discourse that replaced “culture” and regarded some kinds of agency as illusory. Marxist anthropologists of the “political economy” school were also, he felt, deficient in their understanding of culturally grounded political action. He recognized that Eric Wolf, in his final work, “Envisioning Power,” had made an attempt to reconcile “Culture” and “Power,” by creating a power-laden notion of culture. Perhaps, Barrett remarked (following d’Andrade), the effort was doomed, because both concepts were “sinking ships.” By selecting three cases of cultures in crisis, the Kwakiutl and their potlatch, the Aztecs and their sacrifices, and Nazi Germany, Wolf loaded the dice with exemplars that were “dripping with power”. In these cases, ideas and practices that further the interests of elites had a pervasive effect. In other words, a narrow notion of culture prevailed, restricted to the realm of ideas rather than action. Barrett expressed these views in an important article in *The American Anthropologist*, “The Idea of Power and the Power of Ideas” which he co-authored with two Guelph students, Sean Stokholm and Jeanette Burke. The themes discussed in this essay were elaborated in a subsequent volume, published by Praeger, “Culture Meets Power” (2002).

“The Lamb and the Tiger: From Peacekeepers to Peacewarriors in Canada” (2018) was Barrett’s last book. Included in it is a well-sourced anthropological critique of popular ideas about the genetic basis of warfare and/or its cultural inevitability. The main theme of the book is the revival of militarism in Canadian life during the decade when Stephen Harper was Prime Minister.

Due to family circumstances - the death of two brothers and his son's long but successful recovery from burns suffered in a fire in student lodgings (in 2001) - Barrett never completed a study of politics in Corsica that was to embrace banditry, the vendetta, the independence movement and the women's peace movement. He discussed this project and much else in his only textbook, the well received "Anthropology: A Student's Guide to Theory and Method" (2009, second edition).

Our good friend retired from teaching at the University of Guelph more than fifteen years ago, but he never retired from anthropology. He is survived by his wife Kaye, their son, and their daughter.

Andrew P. Lyons