

Colin Fraser and George Gaskell (editors). *The Social Psychological Study of Widespread Beliefs*. Oxford, Clarendon Press (Oxford Science Publications), 1990. Hb xvi + 230 pp. ISBN 0-19-8521340-0

This volume is derived from a conference held in 1985. The twelve contributions are written by, and for, social psychologists, so that the questions a folklorist may ask are only marginally addressed. These texts present a new approach in the study of widespread beliefs (which includes ethnic stereotyping and prejudice). This approach focuses upon social representations—a theory developed by Serge Moscovici that stresses the social dimension of widespread notions and beliefs. The social representation theory is situated in the perspective of constructivism and “sees social representation as theories in their own right which, through a dynamic social process, serve to anchor and objectify the innovations brought to a contemporary life ... and in so doing serve to construct and to communicate realities” (p. 7).

Robert D. Hicks. *In Pursuit of Satan: The Police and the Occult*. Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books, 1991. 420pp + index. ISBN 0-87975-604-7.

The thesis of this insightful and extensively documented work is that a growing number of active or former police officers, who provide “educational” sessions about satanic crimes for other police and a variety of law enforcement groups, are themselves largely responsible for fostering the widespread “satanic panic” in the United States. A criminal justice analyst with anthropological training, the author, Robert D. Hicks is a former police officer who has personally experienced such “cult cop” seminars and witnessed their spread of misinformation.

The alarm signalled by his book is that the questionable arguments of many cult cops, along with those of some “survivors” of ritualistic satanic abuse and their supportive social workers and psychologists, are reaching gullible mass audiences through inexpensive paperback books, television talk shows and other avenues of popular culture. Their views and the spurious “facts” they present are rarely challenged because voicing skepticism or being critical of their testimonies is tantamount

to being partial to Satanism. Hicks reasons that the uniformity of the cult cop model of satanic activities ("dabblers" to international conspiracy), their ill-defined and interchangeable use of terms such as *cult*, *occult*, *ritualistic*, and *satanic*, and their linkage of such heterogeneous activities as role-playing games, teen suicides, heavy metal rock, cemetery vandalism, child abuse at day care centers, human sacrifice, and contemporary witchcraft, all manifest an uncritical, "true believer" stance.

Often advocating fundamentalist Christian biases, cult cops pass ethnocentric judgments on what constitutes satanic activity and "can't resist criticizing non-Christian beliefs" (p. 54). Thus even certain forms of library use have been open to question; in at least one instance officers were advised by a cult cop "to contact public libraries for names of patrons who have borrowed books on the occult" (p. 55). Folklorists and anthropologists should note that Sir James Frazer's classic *The Golden Bough* is suspect! Tragically, given their fundamentalist position, cult cops have no qualms about passing judgments on the magico-religious belief systems of ethnic minorities. Thus in hispanic communities traditional healers or *curanderos* have been the subjects of accusations of satanic crime involvement as have been practitioners of the popular Cuban religion of Santeria. Cult seminars, therefore, cultivate racism, for as Hicks states, "unlike officers in Los Angeles ... those in Boise ... will never find much use for their new training in Santeria, but they will learn to become suspicious when Latino immigrants come to town" (p. 137).

Perhaps the most convincing voices in support of the existence of an organized satanic crime wave are those of cult survivors and their social workers, psychologists, and psychiatrists. Hicks argues that some therapists in support of their patients "become *believers* [and] step away from scientific procedures" (p. 141). Moreover, he queries that "since some of these therapists have developed an extensive network across the country through which to share symptoms and treatment hints, is it possible that the therapists themselves participate in creating the cult stories?" (p. 141) The idea that some survivors have "invented" memories of ritual assault through the suggestions of professionals and a growing popular literature is abhorrent to many, but it is the special status that such memories have attained that

prohibits disbelief and inhibits empirical inquiry. Based on Freud's problematic theory of repression, the validity of induced memories is currently the subject of extensive psychological research (see Lawrence Wright's two-part article in the *New Yorker*, "Remembering Satan" [17 May 1993: 60–81; 24 May 1993: 54–76]). Approaching the content of survivor narratives from a cultural perspective, Hicks concludes that "cult survivors don't make good ethnographic informants; their tales of lifelong involvement with satanic rituals simply don't blend plausibly with other facets of their lives. ...while claiming (through therapy) to have been part of a satanic subculture, [they] can come up with none of this information to create a whole picture" (p. 167).

Issues of repression and the believability of induced memories are compounded when children are involved. Because of the widespread taboo against questioning the veracity of children's allegations, lawyers defending persons accused of satanic child abuse at day care centers have had to dispense with the most basic line of defence in American jurisprudence—the credibility of the witness. Emphasizing the different goals of therapy and police work, Hicks warns that "by virtue of their training and experience, [therapists] cannot discern truth-telling except by *feel*." He counsels officers, therefore, to examine the truthfulness of induced stories "but if corroboration fails to surface, the officer *must* consider *disbelieving* the survivor's tale for *investigative purposes*" (p. 181). The tragedies arising from the directed coaching of children's testimonies at day care center abuse trials, so well documented in Hicks's book and by Ofra Bikel's recent (20–21 July 1993) four-hour-long documentary film, *Innocence Lost*, on American public television's *Frontline* (PBS), are that in the pursuit of satanic ritual abuse actual physical and mental abuse of children may be overlooked, the judicial process itself becomes abusive to children, and the lives of many innocent adults are wrecked.

Being aware of folkloristic contributions to our understanding of the satanic panic, Hicks contends that much of the "evidence" marshalled by cult cops to prove their theory of satanic conspirators consists of folklore. Paradoxically, there is no hard evidence to support conspiratorial allegations, but it is precisely this lack of evidence which confirms the faith of law enforcers. Hicks

explains that since cult cops believe that "Satanists measure their success by leaving no evidence, the more successful they become at kidnapping, child abuse, and murder, the fewer clues they leave behind" (p. 58). Belief narratives, therefore, are fundamental to cult cops' faith in satanic activity and, as Hicks maintains, "*urban legend* plays a role in the creation and diffusion of satanic claims" (p. 323). Virtually all sensational satanic activities are well-known motifs of oral tradition and in a climate of panic "occult ingredients feed the public's appetite for sensation; urban legends are thus simply waiting to happen" (p. 325). As a public sector activist who finds himself in a significant crossfire of ideological and moral debate involving the lives of thousands of persons, Hicks urges folklorists to become more active in the pursuit of social justice: "rumors do play a demonstrable role in stimulating fears of cults and Satanists; yet those with an expertise in folklore seem to remain in the wings, saying nothing" (p. 377).

In conclusion, one may criticize this ponderous volume's bulk. The reiterations and lengthy quotations from a broad variety of primary documents, legal proceedings, and academic sources could have benefitted from some judicious editing. Yet this monograph must be understood as being part of a critical contemporary debate that necessitates restraint, logic, and the extensive citation of data, and this is exactly what Hicks provides. Written in 1990 and published in 1991, this important book preceded James T. Richardson's, Joel Best's and David G. Bromley's *The Satanism Scare*, to which Hicks contributed, and Jeffrey S. Victor's *The Satanic Panic*. Hopefully, the factually based messages of these works will reach a wider audience and what appears to be a twentieth-century repetition of the seventeenth-century Salem witchcraft hysteria in a new guise will come to a rapid, logical conclusion. Many lives hang in the balance.

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