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Savage Systems: Colonialism And Comparative Religion In Southern Africa (Studies In Religion And Culture)



Synopsis

Savage Systems examines the emergence of the concepts of "religion" and "religions" on colonial frontiers. The book offers a detailed analysis of the ways in which European travelers, missionaries, settlers, and government agents, as well as indigenous Africans, engaged in the comparison of alternative religious ways of life as one dimension of intercultural contact. Focusing primarily on nineteenth-century frontier relations, David Chidester demonstrates that the terms and conditions for comparison--including a discourse about "otherness" that were established during this period still remains. A volume in the series Studies in Religion and Culture

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Customer Reviews

This work is the most thorough study of the meaning, construction, and definition of religion in any specific area of the world. It is a model that could be adopted with profit by scholars working in other areas of the world. (Charles Long, University of California, Santa Barbara) A highly original critical history of comparative religion in southern Africa that opens up the field well beyond South Africa and puts Euro-American work on notice about the bearing of its political context. The book is on the cutting edge of comparative religion internationally and could serve well as a text in the methodological courses increasingly required in departments of religion. (Eugene M. Klaaren, Wesleyan University)

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This book, *The Savage System* by David Chidester highlighting colonialism and comparative religion in Southern Africa has proven the validity of Edward Said's thesis on Orientalism. In his Foucauldian work *Orientalism*, Said affirms that orientalism is an attempt to understand society group along with its culture in a way they look themselves. In another word, it is looking at society with your own perspectives. (Said, 1979) Unfortunately, as the orientalist were the references of the colonial power, it was one of the tools to hegemonize the power. The colonialists interpret the colonized people in a way they want to prolong their colonialization. It was the power of knowledge. Once Said says in PBS TV: They (the Western sources) look the Arab, in a way I never understand it was my culture" David Chidester approaches similarly in his determination of comparative religions in Southern Africa in three periods; frontier, imperial, and Apartheid. The frontier period, is the oldest period of comparative religion on southern Africa. In that, the earliest frontiers described African as people with no religion. no gods no worship, no temple. They similiarized African people with animal uncivilized. The Imperial period is after the frontier era that is within the earlier days of colonial era. Not so much different from the previous period, the description of African people in this period is negative. African is just above the animal the have only the savage religion. They worship natural stuffs like three, animals, idols, stones, ect. The apartheid comparative religion, although has been in a modern period, describes the African as just its previous period in which African were uncivilized, no religions and hold primitive religions in which Africans are described as worshipping the moon and the sun. The three periods as Chidester highlights is in an accordance with his main thesis that comparative religions (religious study?) were very European centric. What was perceived as religion should fit with the European thought of religions. There should be one God, sanctuary, and prophet. Agreed with Foucault approach Chidester reveals this doles not successfully reveals what actually the reality belonged to African. I think Chidester deserves appraise as he has successfully elaborated the European centric even in the comparative religions. Just as the same phenomena described for the colonized people in Malay and Indonesia or some Middle Eastern countries that

Edward Said reveals. No other orientation in that creation except an attempt to marginalize the colonized people and to keep them colonized. It is undeniably true.

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