

Cactus pilgrims

By Peter Rivière

BARBARA G. MYERHOFF:

Peyote Hunt

285pp. Cornell University Press (IBEG). £7.50.

Until recently the Huichol Indians of Mexico have managed to remain remote and aloof in the inaccessible Sierra Madre Occidental. This situation is rapidly changing, and *Peyote Hunt* is the second full-length monograph on these Indians reviewed in the TLS in recent years (oddly enough, the first, Marino Benzi's *Les derniers adorateurs du peyotil*, a very substantial ethnography, receives no mention in this new work). Besides this increasing scientific interest, the Huichol have also been the focus of less serious-minded curiosity because peyote, the hallucinative cactus *Lophorora wiliamsii* which contains mescaline, plays an essential part in their religious beliefs and practices.

Barbara Myerhoff considers a particular aspect of these—the annual pilgrimage to obtain the year's supply of peyote—to the almost total exclusion of other ethnographic information. This is partly explainable by the fact that although the author accompanied a group of pilgrims on the sacred journey, she conducted little fieldwork in the usual anthropological sense. Most of her data were obtained from a single informant, a shaman-priest, who lived on the outskirts of Guadalajara, some distance from Huichol territory. It was the same shaman-priest who led the pilgrimage that she accompanied.

Dr Myerhoff has divided her study of the peyote hunt into six chapters. In the first she discusses her main informant, the shaman-priest Ramón and his wife Lupe, and her relationship with them. She then provides a skimpy ethnographic and historical background to the Huichol Indians, which includes the inadequately supported assumption

those deities directly involved in the deer-maize-peyote complex.

The fourth chapter, which is the core of the book, contains two descriptions of the peyote hunt, that of the anthropologist and that of the shaman-priest. The peyote hunt is a lengthy annual pilgrimage to a desert region which the Huichol call "Wirikuta", the land of their origin where their gods still dwell. Here the peyote for use throughout the forthcoming year has to be collected, or more correctly hunted and shot, because in Wirikuta the deer, the maize and the peyote form a trinity of one in three and three in one. At the same time the pilgrims themselves become deities, a transformation which is marked by a number of behavioural changes including language reversals.

In the last two chapters an attempt is made at an analysis and explanation of the deer-maize-peyote complex. First of all the individual elements of the complex are considered, and then the interrelationships are examined. The conclusion is that the three elements form a unity but combine the deer as expressing the past and the maize the present, while the peyote has a quality which exists outside time. In the final chapter an interpretation of the purpose and meaning of the peyote hunt itself is given. The peyote hunt is represented as a return to paradise, to the birth-place of the gods and of the Huichol themselves, where the elements of the deer-maize-peyote complex become one, and by so doing resolve the problems and paradoxes of everyday life.

In many ways the author's explicit and heavy reliance on the ideas of Victor Turner, Lévi-Strauss and Mircea Eliade makes the conclusions almost inevitable. Dr Myerhoff has also been unfortunate in her selective borrowing from these writers. This can be well illustrated by her dependency on Turner's ill-defined notion of *communitas* but disregard for the strong sociological component that enters into most of his analyses of ritual. Indeed the deliberate

Languages of contact

By R. B. Le Page

LORETO TODD:
Pidgins and Creoles

106pp. Routledge and Kegan Paul. £2.50 (paperback, £1.25).

It would be very easy to do an injustice to this short book on a large subject. It has many virtues: clarity of exposition, readability, general (though not complete) scholarlyness; valuable intent. Within its self-set limits it is surprisingly comprehensive, and a very useful book for the layman.

The title is in some respects misleading. The focus is on West African and West Indian varieties of pidgin and creole English—especially Cameroon Pidgin and Jamaican Creole; their linguistic and social history; and their current educational significance. The discussion is set in a wider framework, but there is not much discussion of or exemplification from Creole French, Creole Portuguese, or the many non-European-based contact languages.

Even within Loreto Todd's chosen field there are gaps: it seems idiosyncratic not to refer to Gilbert Schneider's pioneering work on Cameroon Pidgin, and to lean heavily on F. G. Cassidy's *Jamaica Talk* (and on other unacknowledged Jamaican sources) while ignoring the standard *Dictionary of*

Jamaican English. Writing from Leeds, with its immigrant West Indian and Sikh communities, she should have known better than to distinguish between "dialects of English" and "creole dialects" on the basis of the supposed mutual intelligibility of "abutting" dialects of English. Intelligibility is a property of people's behaviour, not of systematic abstractions called "dialects" or "languages". A good many small criticisms of this kind could be made.

From the specialist point of view there are two more serious weaknesses which are not peculiar to Miss Todd but are related to current theoretical weaknesses in the field of creole language studies and sociolinguistics. In the first place, in spite of the fact that the book is the first in a series on "Language and Society", language is spoken about primarily in the terminology of autonomous linguistics of a not very profound kind, and is only secondarily related to social contexts. More advanced work on contact-languages and contact-situations now aims at a sociolinguistic description that genuinely integrates social and linguistic processes within one theory.

Miss Todd has been to some extent sidetracked by the rather sterile arguments of taxonomic and "genetic" creolists. Can we call this creole or that an Atlantic or Pacific creole? Are they all related to Sabir through successive "relexifications"? and so on. Such ques-

tions were once meaningful to Romance philologists, but it was only the special circumstances of Romance studies that gave them temporary credibility. Miss Todd herself suggests that she really knows this, but a rather vague reference to modern theories of linguistic universals does not redeem her. Moreover, in an old-fashioned way she speaks of languages, rather than people, doing things: "In such circumstances [the pidgin] may continue to expand using its own resources or, more likely, it may borrow from the new dominant language."

And so to the second criticism. A sociolinguistic theory which, although observer-orientated, fails to distinguish, in a variety of contexts, between what people think they are doing, what they say they are doing, what they think they ought to be doing, and what other observe them to be doing and think they ought to be doing leads one into many pits. Miss Todd has fallen into some of these. For example, while it is true that West Indian teachers are not supposed to teach in creole, in practice many of them have been doing it for years—except when the inspector or Miss Todd are around. Her valuable chapter, "The scope of pidgins and creoles", would have been more valuable still and the whole book illuminated if she had perceived this.

Competition in the Kush

SCHUYLER JONES:

Men of Influence in Nuristan
A Study of Social Control and Dispute Settlement in Waigal Valley, Afghanistan

299pp. Seminar Press. £4.90.

On the southern slopes of the Hindu Kush in valleys accessible only by

are no markets in the valley, everything has a well-defined valuation, the unit of value being the goat. Thus in the past the semi-servile craftsmen and workers were bought and sold, the price being 120 goats: this was half the value assigned to one of their superiors in questions of compensation for loss of life.

The other main form of competition is in the giving of feasts and

The class of '72

By Douglas Johnson

GERARD VINCENT:

Le peuple lycéen
Enquête sur les élèves de l'enseignement secondaire

531pp. Paris: Gallimard. 38fr.

Birth of a pidgin language

(Scene: Lisbon, 1950's; English family travelling - passing Customs.) ^(who wore their grey alpaca uniforms with an air and yet with a hint of injured dignity, like assigned generals, standing again at the customs.)

All the Customs officers were distinguished-looking men. The one Bowen got obviously felt his loss of status keenly but between them they soon evolved an Anglo-Franco-Portuguese patois which, eked out with a bit of Latin on Bowen's side, served their purpose.

1958 Kingsley Amis I like it here (Gollancz, 8th impression)

p. 57.

1971