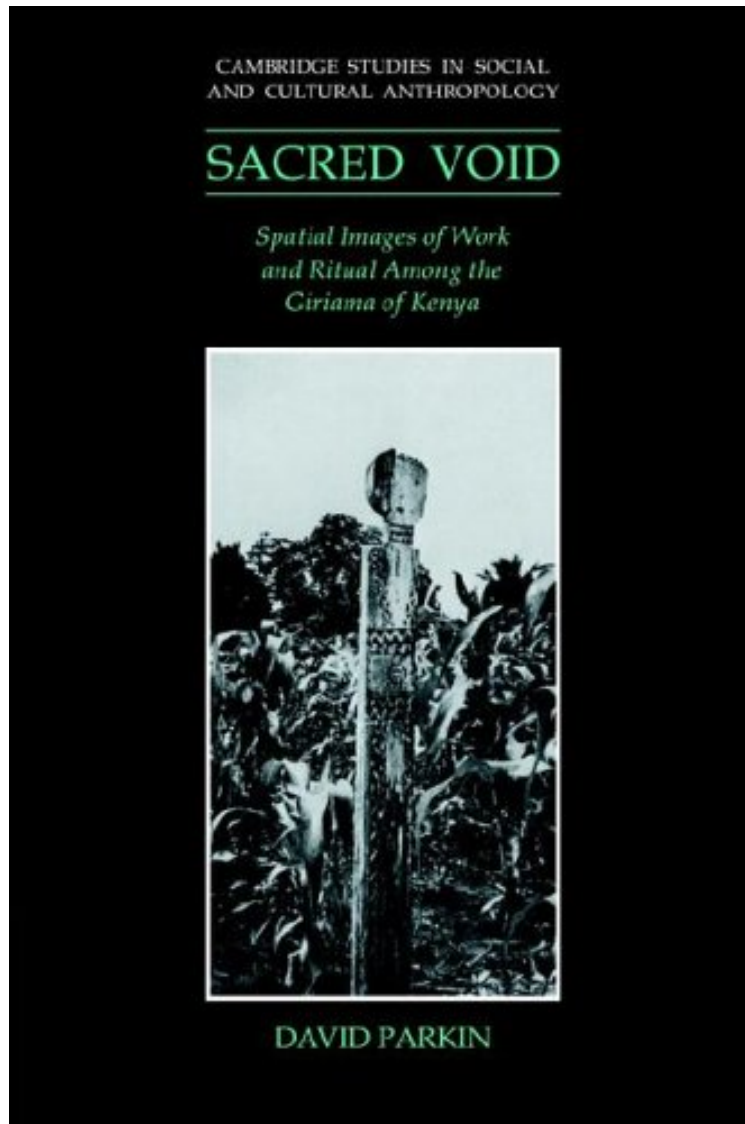


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(Cambridge Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology)

The Sacred Void: Spatial Images of Work and Ritual among the Giriama of Kenya (Cambridge Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology)

David Parkin

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In this innovative study, David Parkin shows how indigenous African rites and beliefs may be reworked to accommodate a variety of economic systems, new spatial and ecological relations among communities, and the locally variable influences of Islam and Christianity. The Giriama people of Kenya include pastoralists living in the hinterland; farmers, who work land closer to the coast; and migrants, who earn money as laborers or fisherman on the coast itself. Wherever they live, they revere an ancient and formerly fortified capital, located in the pastoralist hinterland, which few of them ever see or visit. It is the site of occasional large-scale ceremonies and becomes especially important at times of national crisis. It then acts as a moral core of Giriama society, and a symbolic defense against total domination and assimilation.

"On one level it is a significant contribution to anthropological theory....It is, at the same time, an historical case study of relationships between meanings of ethnic identity and territory amidst a sea of social change....Parkin's work here is representative of the best in current historically oriented ethnography." *Ethnohistory*"David Parkin's book on the Giriama of Kenya combines conceptual finesse and stylistic elegance with a sensitivity for issues in religious studies rare among anthropologists...Parkin keeps the reader reeling between keen insights and a wealth of well-organized ethnographic data. The result is a rare and important work that offers common ground for scholars of religion(s) and anthropologists." *The Journal of Religion*"Parkin's study is both ambitious and extremely informative." *American Anthropologist*"Parkin portrays, with notable sensitivity, Giriama ambivalence with regard to the newer ideas and practices available on the coast, and, in particular, the combination of Islam, divination, and egalitarian authority." -- *Choice*"As one would expect of its author, the book is lucidly written, comprising a coherent essay from start to finish." *The Canadian of Sociology and Anthropology*"Parkin provides us with an insightful contribution to the anthropology of knowledge and one well-developed answer to the question, What is the nature of a specific culture?" Frederick C. Gamst, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*"This is a fine ethnographic account of an African people. Superb in its detail, and original and insightful in interpretation, it brings to life the thoughts, fears, and perceptions of the Giriama people and provides a sophisticated model of a complex society that has great value for comparative understanding of African and other societies...David Parkin offers a deep analytical understanding of what is actually happening in Giriama society, both in their eyes and in his own...This is an unusual, and indeed rare, book of sensitivity and ethnographic writing." John Middleton, *Journal of Ritual Studies*