

SPACE-TIME OF THE BORORO OF BRAZIL

Stephen Michael Fabian, 1992
Review by Audrey Ricke

Space-time of the Bororo of Brazil is an intriguing ethnography of the Bororo people written by Stephan Michael Fabian. Primarily through studying their knowledge of astronomy, he addresses the question of whether the Bororo have a way of determining how time passes. Fabian convincingly argues that the Bororo possessed a definite knowledge of space and time passage although they do not have the exact words to express this concept. Furthermore, this book is accessible to anyone with an anthropological background and those interested in culture and astronomy. The information in this book would be helpful in educating others about non-Western space-time concepts.

Fabian's primary point is to explain how the Bororo keep track of time. Environmental factors, such as the blooming of certain flowers, combined with certain astronomical features, such as Pleiades constellation, help determine when certain cultural events will be held. For example, Fabian reports that the funeral ceremony, the most important Bororo cultural event, is marked by the beginning of the rainy season and the appearance of Pleiades in the sky. In order to counter the monotony of scientific data, Fabian incorporates humorous anecdotes. One of these retold the Bororo's initial reaction to the idea of designating a specific date for the start of a season. The Bororo, who do not feel it necessary to name the days of the week, laughed at such a ridiculous idea. For them, natural indicators are much more suitable.

In addition, Fabian successfully demonstrates how the Bororo's observations of rotating patterns of constellations were incorporated into their social structure, namely their circular village layout. The amount of detail provided concerning the significance of the sun's and moon's heavenly position and the role of guards of the night, who are members of the tribe and notify the people of specific predawn times, convince the reader of Fabian's point. Moreover, the numerous charts, drawings, a few photographs, and a constellation foldout map included in this book aid the readers in understanding the Bororo's perception of time and space.

Since Fabian was involved in fieldwork with the Bororo, his major points develop out of his observations, but he uses the published sources to guide and support his conclusions. Both his bibliography and his footnotes are very com-

plete. Many of the sources were written by anthropologists who had previously done fieldwork with the Bororo or a neighboring tribe Fabian strongly indorses *Enciclopedia Bororo*, which was compiled by Salesian missionaries living amongst the Bororo. Furthermore, he lists in brackets additional readings that go more in depth on the subject that he is currently discussing while the foot-notes provide additional explanations of foreign words, which appear in the text.

Fabian's style is very straightforward and honest. He explains in the book's first chapters his objectives and provides background information about the Bororo culture. Throughout the rest of the book, especially in the last chapters, Fabian clarifies his points by restating them in a developing context. While his detailed-packed first chapters may seem overwhelming at first, Fabian rewards the reader with a sense of satisfaction in the final chapters when all of the information culminates in understanding. The logical and data-supported points culminate in a very enlightening and comprehensive conclusion.