

Culture



Roy WILLIS, *A State in the Making: Myth, History and Social Transformation in Pre-Colonial Ufipa*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1981. 322 pages, US \$32.50 (cloth)

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Roy WILLIS, *A State in the Making : Myth, History and Social Transformation in Pre-Colonial Ufipa*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1981. 322 pages, US \$32.50 (cloth).

By Jeanne Cannizzo
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One September morning in 1897 Nandi Msuulwa sent away his family, dressed himself in all his court regalia, sat down on his royal stool and shot himself. Thus perished the last independent king of Ufipa. The history of the kings and people of this East African state, from the appearance of the first man in the world who fell to the ground when the earth and sky separated, to their eventual incorporation in the German colonial empire is chronicled and interpreted by Roy Willis in *A State in the Making*.

The book itself has a history as well : it is a reworking of material from his doctoral dissertation which presented "a structural comparison between the key myth as a statement about sovereignty and Fipa ideas about descent" (p. xviii). The result of this reworking is what its author calls "a marriage of a revisionist structuralism and a historical reconstruction that has been strongly influenced by Marxist theory", with the theory of imbalanced exchange attending the happy couple (p. xix). In addition to revealing his theoretical bias, he suggests (in an admirably succinct way sure to raise the hackles of grant-giving bureaucrats) that his methodology consists of going around meeting people.

Turning back to the work rather than its genesis, we begin with the first of three parts : an indigenous history that is mainly embodied in the key myth. Elements of this narrative are interpreted according to a dual focus : a cosmological aspect and an action aspect which may be thought of as corresponding to the Geertzian notions of 'models of' and 'models for' reality. These are then linked to ideological and objective history, the latter being seen as comprised of cross-culturally applicable concepts. We can see how this approach works by looking at one central theme in the key myth : the appearance of a group of strange women from the north who eventually take possession of the kingdom by sitting on the royal stool in the village of Milansi, occasioning a division of the country.

At the cosmological level we are dealing among other things with the relationship between femininity and its associations of sexual energy, labour and wealth while masculinity is associated with intellect, spirituality, control and restriction. On the

action level we have an imbalanced exchange between the higher values held by those of Milansi and the lesser but complementary ones offered by the Twa women. Historically, we are presented with a revolutionary transformation of structure based on the use of compost-mound fertilization rather than the less productive slash and burn techniques. Fipa society changes from one "organized by a hierarchically segmented and ramifying descent group (the dominant, conical clan) to one in which sovereignty was divided between two complementary and hierarchically related foci of authority, and in which the organizing function of descent was restricted to the level of domestic production and exchange" (p. 37). And so it goes, through legendary events representing foreign immigrations, fusion, and fission and finally the development of late pre-colonial Fipa society, which is the centre of Part Two.

The two rival states of Nkansi and Lyangalile are described circa 1880, a date representing the epitome of indigenous development before advancing colonialism caused the collapse of the transcontinental trading networks so important to the Fipa states. Based on comments by early Europeans, informants' living memory, and Willis' own observations in the field, this section offers information on a wide variety of topics. These include the cultivation cycle and the control of time ; the use of cooperative labour by elder village householders and economic inequality between formally equal householders ; kindred and descent names ; the symbolic and economic significance of iron-smiths and others who produce for exchange ; and the administrative structure of the consensual state in which control is achieved through the flow of information available from government agents. One of the most interesting chapters in this second part, one disproportionately short, is on the female magistrate responsible for the maintenance of public order in the village which she promotes through the levy of fines for verbal obscenity.

The third and concluding section begins with a piece, again rather slight for the intellectual and structural load it is shouldering, on the myth as social model and history. It is meant to bring together the preceding parts. On the one hand we have seniority, maleness, restraint and communication in analogous association, which are opposed to the constellation of juniority, femaleness, force and sexuality. These attributes, which can be mythologically identified with the king of Milansi and the women strangers, were "realized in the bifurcated administrative structure of the late pre-colonial Twa state, divided as it was into a formally senior

apparatus staffed by men and subject to norms of reciprocity and agreement, and a formally junior system staffed by women using force to suppress and punish what were classified as sexual offences” (p. 187).

Finally, Willis considers the evolution of the Fipa state from a comparative stance, rejecting the conquest and population pressure models of state formation. The Epilogue relates the end of indigenous rule.

Some readers, or to further the metaphor, guests at the marriage, might be disappointed in this iced and multi-layered wedding cake of a book. The revisionist structuralism is a thin, rather superficial overlay, not nearly sweet enough. The various layers underneath seem at times to be a bit ill mixed, the style a bit dried out, and the arguments rather crumbly in places. But it is made with good, rich ingredients, and it is nice to see a new recipe. Even the master patissier, as surely Willis is, doesn't always confect the perfect cake.

Alfred ADLER, *La mort est le masque du roi. La royauté sacrée chez les Moundang du Tchad*, Paris, Payot, Collection « Bibliothèque scientifique », 1982. 431 pages, cartes, figures, illustrations hors texte.

Par Jean-Claude Muller
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Ce livre est important pour plusieurs raisons. Tout d'abord, il s'intéresse à une région relativement mal documentée, le sud-ouest du Tchad, et il constitue donc une addition des plus nécessaires à la simple connaissance ethnographique. Deuxièmement, l'ouvrage traite d'une royauté sacrée, ou divine si l'on emploie la terminologie de Frazer, qui fonctionne encore — pour combien de temps? — ce qui permet à l'auteur de faire une étude exhaustive d'un complexe dont on n'avait généralement rapporté que des bribes sans pouvoir toujours donner une description complète des institutions et de leurs interrelations. Troisièmement, Adler prend le parti d'écouter et de rapporter ce que disent les intéressés ainsi que d'observer ce qu'ils font en ne négligeant rien. Cette approche est méthodologiquement importante car elle évite les pièges dans lesquels sont tombés certains fonctionnalistes anglais lorsqu'ils se sont intéressés à la royauté sacrée. Au lieu de partir des prémisses que la symbolique du pouvoir royal fondait celui-ci, comme le prétend

Adler et quelques autres ethnologues encore trop rares, ces auteurs ont fait de cette symbolique un simple reflet du pouvoir royal, sans pouvoir réellement expliquer l'une et l'autre. C'était mettre la charrue devant les bœufs et tout le livre nous montre bien que la conception moundang de la royauté est constituante du pouvoir et non constituée par celui-ci mais pour démontrer cela il faut pourchasser cette structure symbolique dans ses moindres recoins et établir comment elle instaure un tout qui englobe forme et contenu.

La première partie de l'ouvrage traite de l'histoire de la région, du mythe de fondation de la royauté moundang et de ses relations avec les clans. Une discussion très intéressante montre que les clans ne sont pas en opposition avec la royauté, chacun remplissant des fonctions complémentaires au sein de celle-ci. On trouvera ici une stimulante analyse du totémisme moundang, qui reprend et amplifie les idées du célèbre volume de Lévi-Strauss sur la question. Le problème de l'esclavage est ensuite abordé ainsi que celui des fils du roi, devenus princes et chefs de village à la première génération, mais dont les enfants perdent successivement leurs attributs pour devenir des gens du commun à la troisième génération, gens du commun appartenant à un clan spécial qui s'accroît ainsi à chaque génération. C'est un ingénieux mécanisme pour éviter la surpopulation princière.

L'analyse se poursuit par un exposé de la parenté et de l'alliance ; la documentation présentée est riche mais par moments un peu rapide. Je pense ici à la caractérisation schématique du système décrit comme omaha qu'il y aurait intérêt à mieux discuter dans le détail. Mais il est vrai que l'auteur nous promet un traitement plus exhaustif de la question du mariage moundang pour une autre publication. Un aspect important de la parenté moundang est la place symbolique réservée aux jumeaux ; Adler décortique, dans des pages brillantes, la signification profonde des rites relatifs à ceux-ci en les mettant en parallèle avec certains aspects de la royauté.

La seconde partie du livre est réservée plus spécifiquement à la royauté et examine les « faiseurs de rois », puis les affidés du souverain et, enfin, l'étrange ferme gigantesque que constitue le palais du roi où ses innombrables épouses travaillent à cultiver du grain pour régaler les hôtes lors des rituels royaux. Le cycle annuel de ces rites est la clé maîtresse du système ; il nous est décrit en grand détail ainsi que les rites d'intronisation et de funérailles du roi qui mettent un point final à l'ouvrage.

C'est une fresque impressionnante et minutieuse, mais jamais ennuyeuse, qui réjouira tous