

in his discussion of the new Hausa video film industry, the recent introduction of *shari'a* caused only a momentary interruption in film production, although censorship was certainly tightened.

A discussion of the critical role of film piracy leads into a concluding consideration of breakdown and repair. In sharp contrast to the temporary technology awe are the derailments, van wrecks, power failures and persistent acts of piracy that hobble the most powerful technologies and lead to the ingenious solutions that operate in spite of the state. As Larkin so aptly observes, it is no longer the rhythms of Afro pop that provide the background noise in contemporary Nigeria, but the persistent hum of generators providing an alternative source of power. It is with insights like this one, often eloquently expressed, that Larkin's effort to refashion media theory is likely to be realized.

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### A SUBTLE THEORETICAL ACCOUNT OF KINGSHIP IN THE CAMEROON GRASSFIELDS

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*The Pot-King: The Body and Technologies of Power.* By JEAN-PIERRE WARNIER. (African Social Studies Series, 17). Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2007.

Pp. x + 326. €79, paperback (ISBN 978-90-04-15217-5).

KEY WORDS: Cameroon, kingdom and states, knowledge, power.

In this ambitious and far-reaching book, the French anthropologist Jean-Pierre Warnier presents a synthesis based on more than thirty years' research in the Cameroon Grassfields kingdom of Mankon, in which he explores an innovative and significant range of new theoretical perspectives which provide a refreshingly different perspective from that of structuralism and semiotics. Much of the theoretical interest lies in some of the theoretical juxtapositions and counterpoints he identifies, although sadly I must note that the presentation is marred by the English (a point I will return to).

The starting point is the intuition that 'Knowledge How' is both far more pervasive and important than 'Knowledge That'. If this is correct, then researchers have a problem, because, typically, if you think or speak about something you know how to do (such as riding a bike), then you cannot do it. By acquiring a practical skill successfully, it sinks beneath the surface of consciousness, which makes these things so difficult to discuss with historians or ethnographers. Warnier calls this the Magritte Effect (alluding to the painting *La trahison des images: Ceci c'est ne pas une pipe*): the mistake academics make is to confuse a representation for the thing itself. Later (p. 276) he calls this 'verbalisation fetishism'. To avoid making the same mistake himself, Warnier has returned to data from his earliest fieldtrips in the 1970s (and made a follow-up visit when preparing this book in 2002). His focus is now profoundly different: he is interested in people as they act, and especially how they perform actions with things.

The resulting account of Grassfields kingship is fascinating. Features familiar to regional specialists are made unusual by Warnier's account, which replaces conventional emphasis on the results of interviews and the analysts' account of symbolism with the tracing of how people and substances cohere, circulate and interact. Mankon practices of child rearing, particularly the oiling and massage of

babies after their daily bath link to the rubbing of powdered camwood on spouses, and on notables as they acquire their titles. The notables, and the king above all are containers in which are stored the blessings and vital spirit of the dead. This enables fertility, and is dispersed through treatment of doorways, ritual objects, and directly through semen and the spraying of palm wine. Their subjects are envelopes of skin, and it is through the application of blessing to the skin that the potency is transferred.

What enters the body also leaves through different routes: positively as blessings; negatively as excrement. Even the breath and words of the king are powerful/dangerous: most people cannot address or be directly addressed by him. Warnier makes a fascinating update to his earlier article on slavery, 'Trade without raids' (1989). He connects the dynamics of power in the kingdom (in which junior lineage members and political pretenders could be eliminated – a semantic part of the parallel with bodily functions) to witchcraft. In Mankon, until the second half of the twentieth century, suspected witches were subject to a poison ordeal in which many suspects died.

In constructing his account, Warnier introduces several terms which will be new to most readers of this journal. The ethnography explains the title phrase 'the potting' (although he does not consider the substantial literature connecting people and pots from northern Nigeria and northern Cameroon, especially associated with Marla Berns, Nic David and Judy Sterner): kings and notables are piggy banks, storing wealth in the form of potency, the ability to effect change. Warnier returns to the Fraserian theme of the divine king to discuss the unchanging essence of the king despite its different holders (where the piggy bank metaphor fails, since only the latter must be broken to extract the savings). The theoretical vocabulary is also novel. Eschewing terms like 'embodiment' or 'embodied knowledge', we have to contend with 'a praxeological and cognitive approach to subjectivity by sensori-motor and material cultures in agency' (p. 22). The point of this is that the co-occurrence of sensori-motor conducts, gestures and the objects we interact with bestow on performance its potential for symbolization and its impact on the performers and subjects (p. 62). Our focus should not be people, bodies or relations between concepts (so structuralism is firmly rejected). It is not isolated individuals trying to make sense of themselves (so psychoanalysis is also rejected, although considerable use is made of some aspects of contemporary psychoanalysis), but people interacting with each other, and the objects in their environment. We have to deal with *motivity*, the body in motion; human society is ineluctably dynamic and Warnier wants to reject any account which is fixed and static. Out goes functionalism and structuralism (again). The key theoretical players he invokes are Bayart, Foucault and Parlebas, drawing inspiration from Mauss (on techniques of the body). Bayart and he have collaborated over recent years, not only as fellow Cameroonists but as colleagues seeking ways of linking political structures to individuals living in the world – hence Foucault, hence the stress on material culture.

Bayart also provides us with a new way of thinking about states and nationalism:

I agree with the argument developed by Bayart (2004) regarding the relationship between the state and transnational exchanges. The circulation of persons and commodities do[es] not develop between closed states and *after* these have been founded. States are a response to the circulations at large of persons and commodities. (p. 275)

This is part of the larger significance of this book. As Warnier argues in his conclusion, it is not just an argument about West African kingdoms; the approach is applicable to Europe and the rest of the world. By making material culture, the cultural practices of child-raising and ways in which sexuality is managed central

to historical understanding, Warnier wants to change the sorts of evidence we consider and how we attempt to analyse them.

In the light of this, it is sad that I have to end on a negative note. The text is blighted by a succession of English solecisms which betray the lack of a native speaker in the editorial process. Most of the time I could follow the discussion, but I found it irritating and it distracted from a complex and important argument.

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## AN ECONOMIC HISTORY OF THE ZAMBIAN COPPERBELT

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*Copper Empire: Mining and the Colonial State in Northern Rhodesia, c. 1930–64.*

By LAWRENCE J. BUTLER. Houndsmill, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

Pp. xii + 425. £60 (ISBN 978-0-230-55526-6).

KEY WORDS: Zambia, economic, industrial, labour, mining.

There have been a number of labour histories of the Northern Rhodesian/Zambian Copperbelt, but, with the exception of a single seminal article by Andrew Roberts, the economic history of these mines has remained rather under-researched.<sup>1</sup> The social impact of the mines of Northern Rhodesia/Zambia has long been a profitable field of study for social anthropologists and more recently social historians. Indeed, a recent re-analysis of the works of the Rhodes Livingstone Institute and the ‘Manchester School’, which dealt extensively with the social effects of industrialization, urbanization and migrant labour, led to one of the more rumbustious and entertaining debates in African studies.<sup>2</sup> As regards the actual nitty-gritty of the economic history of mining companies in relation with the colonial and imperial state, there has been no systematic overview as comprehensive as the book under review.

Based on extensive archival research, primarily in the National Archives in Kew, this seven-chapter book seeks ‘to explore the development of the copper mining industry in Northern Rhodesia, from its early stages in the late 1920s until the independence of Zambia in 1964’. The book’s focus is ‘the response of the British colonial state, and of the imperial state to which it was answerable, to this development’, with an aim to providing ‘a case study of business–government relations under colonial rule in a dynamic and volatile sector’ (p. 1). In doing so Butler charts the complicated multiple relationships that existed between copper mining companies, the Northern Rhodesian colonial state, the British South Africa Company and the imperial state. In what was ‘an extraordinary chapter in Britain’s relationship with Africa’ (p. 299), Butler shows that the Northern Rhodesian Copperbelt was an example of large-scale foreign investment that brought rapid

<sup>1</sup> A. D. Roberts, ‘Notes towards a financial history of copper mining in Northern Rhodesia’, *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 16 (1982), 347–59. As regards labour histories, see Francis L. Coleman, *The Northern Rhodesia Copperbelt 1899–1962: Technological Development up to the End of the Central African Federation* (Manchester, 1971), and Elena L. Berger, *Labour, Race, and Colonial Rule: The Copperbelt from 1924 to Independence* (London, 1974).

<sup>2</sup> James Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt* (Berkeley, 1999).