

ten wie „Fanon in Blida“, „Fanon in Tunis“ usw. gab. Viele der Fußnoten wären für ein flüssigeres Lesen und das Verstehen von Ereignissen und Personen, besser in den Text integriert worden. Die Trennung von Fußnoten und Glossar, sowie eine Zeittafel im Anhang machen wenig Sinn. Das Buch enthält ein Vorwort von Lothar Baier und eine vom Verlag zusammengestellte Kurzbibliographie ausgewählter deutschsprachiger Werke.

Als Überblick oder Einstieg zur näheren Beschäftigung mit Frantz Fanon verdient es aber durchaus Lob. Durch ihr leicht lesbares „Porträt“ wird die Autorin ihrem Anspruch gerecht, diesen beachtenswerten Mann auch einem Leserkreis außerhalb der Wissenschaften in Erinnerung zu rufen.

CALLEWAERT, Inger. 2000. *The Birth of Religion among the Balanta of Guinea-Bissau*. Lund Studies in African and Asian Religion. Vol.12. Edited by Tord Olsson. Department of History of Religions. University of Lund, Sweden, 2000, 296 pages.

reviewed by

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The book describes the origin and the development between 1984 and 2000 of a religious movement known as Kiyang-yang among the Balanta, an acephalous society of wet rice cultivators in Guinea-Bissau, organised as small production units geographically dispersed and directed by the eldest of the lineage.

The book also comprehends among other elements: a general presentation of the Balanta social order, an account of the Balanta migration to the South, a historical description of the place of this ethnical group in the midst of the Guinean nation, the chronicle of the tormented relations between the new religious movement and the State, a biography of the prophetess Ntombikte of whom the author has become a friend, extensive descriptions of rituals, the translation of some sixty religious songs with comments, and finally a comparison term by term with another religious and curative women's movement (Fyere Yaabte) being more ancient and displaying practices con-

forming to the Balanta world view. (Fyere Yaabte is related in *Joop de Jong: A descent into African Psychiatry, Amsterdam, 1987*).

However, to my mind the primary quality of Callewaert's book is to describe fully what the ethnographic work can be in our days, in a quite frankly exotic field. The informants of Callewaert have been able to see her children grow up as the research has been proceeding within a span of a dozen years, starting with a residence period of three years, followed by annual stays. In the first chapter we are told how the author (who is Swedish) achieves her first interview with the prophetess, accompanied by the regional representative of the State and two translators who gradually made the translation from Balanta into Creole (derived from the Portuguese that African languages have elaborated upon during the last five hundred years), and then from Creole into French. The account of the objective conditions of the research as well as the minute observation and the detailed report on the interactions between the author and her hosts remain present all through the text, since „it is completely absurd to conceive of an outsider-onlooker“ (p. 144).

One is reminded of the texts of Favret-Saada, when Callewaert states that it is from the changing of place imposed by the people studied, that the ethnography progresses. Adherent of participant observation, she learns Balanta taking part in everyday life without restrictions (to the point that she regularly participates in the rituals of purification), but at the same time she refers to the teaching of P. Bourdieu on participant objectivation. It is in the religious songs that she finds the area where the phenomenon under study is objectified. The songs are not dependent upon the presence of the ethnographer and they provide a discourse where a new world is announced (e.g. the genealogies in the songs attribute to the maternal ancestors the same rank as to the paternal ones, something inconceivable in the Balanta society).

The ethnographer participates in the process of normalisation of this discourse when she puts down on paper more than a hundred of songs. If the author gave her book the title „The birth of religion among the Balanta“ it is because she wants to underscore that her book is less about what could be the birth of a religion, but rather about the differentiation of an autonomous religious field out from the base of the traditional society. We have at our disposal some studies presenting that type of social phenomena, but most

often the ethnographers generally arrive when the narratives and the social relationships are already re-codified.

In 1984, in the south of Guinea-Bissau, a woman prophet creates the Kiyang-yang movement, which spreads rapidly among the Balanta. In June 1985 the government sends a team with helicopters to apprehend some of the leaders and put them in jail for a time, then liberate them after this warning. In 1986 the governmental measures implicate the prohibition of religious and curatives activities for the Kiyang-yang groups and the confiscation of their ritual objects and the medicinal herbs. The situation is not substantially altered until 1994 when the first multi-party elections take place. Why so much repressive action? The regime in power may have felt threatened by the movement, but above all the Kiyang-yang presents itself immediately as a violent revolt against the old Balanta order.

In an oral society structured by kinship, an illiterate woman experiences a psychotic crisis after the death of her new-born child (the concerned institutions estimate child mortality rate before the age of five years at a 50% level), and after a retreat she claims to have been "seized by the unique God" and becomes Maria instead of Ntombikte. Against customary rules she creates a new compound, although she is a woman, and settles there with her son, abducted from his father's house. Since the new order mostly is expressed in the words of the old one, she comments: „I am the man in command“. Women and young people join her and soon create new residential and productive units on which a white flag indicate that they pertain to the movement.

Although the members of these units mostly join on the basis of ethnic affiliation by kinship, they nevertheless claim to gather as the children of Nhaalaa (the unique God); and some of the songs call for the day when all nations will be children of God. Those converted claim that they have been „zak“ by God, which Callewaert translates by „seized“, whereas the traditional way is to say that one enters („yaat“) the path of the ancestors. The new faith calls upon and seizes the individual subject the way kinship has done until now, since the lineage principle is the primary category of thought organising all social relations. Neglecting the invocations to the ancestor spirits (sometimes destroying the shrines in the villages conquered by the movement), the Kiyang-yang communities undermine, in this way, the ideological support of the traditional organisation, the welfare of which re-

quires numerous libations and sacrifices carried out by the elders at every collective or individual event (i.e. from labouring to illness).

The curative and productive welfare of the Balanta does not depend on invocations or sacrifices to the spirits by privileged intermediaries. Ntom-bikte/Maria and her disciples address themselves directly to the unique God, without mediator nor diviner (a central actor on the traditional scene). As told by one of the songs: „Nhaala, you are my father, you are my mother, you are my brothers and sisters (...) Here on earth I put my trust in you, only in you“. It is in using medicinal herbs revealed by Nhaala, that the Kiyang-yang intend to cure different illnesses. Callewaert underscores that it would be an error to perceive of Kiyang-yang as an anti-witchcraft movement. Contrary to such movements Kiyang-yang does not confront witchcraft, but chooses to ignore it, when imploring the protection of Nhaala by purification rituals.

Moreover, the author insists upon the fact that even if the actors are aware of the fact that they are innovating, they do not anticipate all the possible consequences for social change, since „it is a day-to-day discovery of the implications of the initial break that continually provokes transformation of established practices and thoughts. The daily practice and reflection will constantly have to respond to the next consequences of previous steps“ (p.66). In this way a hierarchy based upon purity, where those who wear white clothing distinguish themselves from the others, replaces the traditional hierarchy, which is cast in ten age classes for men and five for women, founding the traditional social relations. It is the end of gerontocratic power and of the hierarchical gender relations, but „such a radical change is not achieved because one idea leads to the other, but because one practice is almost imperceptibly forced into transforming itself into the next one“ (p.66). Some themes are borrowed from Islam and Christianity. Thus the wish of the communities to have a common central house of prayer, the decorative use of flowers, the symbolic use of books in a milieu which is totally illiterate, or the collective lessons of kiyang-yang writing, which characters are close to the marabout Arabic verses ... the examples are numerous. The elders' reaction was at first to wait and see, then to oppose, and finally, according to the author, for many of them, to consider that a new Balanta world was taking shape, but being too old they would not become part of it.

If one has to complete this book review by voicing critique, one could state that the work lacks (besides an index) a comparative perspective. With the exception of references to *La cause des prophètes* by Dozon (1995) and to the works of R. Horton, Callewaert limits herself exclusively to the study of the Balanta of Guinea-Bissau. That was after all her objective, but as it is of primary importance that she follows up the development of the Kiyang-yang, it seems to me that the rigour, the honesty and the intelligence invested in her monograph, could be used in a systematic study of broad theoretical scope, dedicated to the genesis of this sort of movements. She is equipped with long experience of the field, and few researchers are as well trained as she is in knowing how to recognise the regularities, the continuities and the structure of that field.