

MYRTLE S. LANGLEY, *THE NANDI OF KENYA: Life Crisis Rituals in a Period of Change*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979, 154 pp., \$22.50.

Dr. Langley, who states that this book is an abridgement of her doctoral dissertation, lectures in "missiology" at Trinity College, Bristol. This is a serious, sober, astonishing, and disappointing work.

It is astonishing because one wonders how a well-meaning individual could live among a group of people for years and understand them so little. It is disappointing for many reasons, not the least of which is that it suffers in comparison with books on the same subject written by native Kenyan authors. One specific example is James Ngugi's *The River Between* (1965) which treats in fiction one of Langley's subjects: female circumcision.

Langley also combines with dubious success anthropology and moral judgement:

...although to the first missionaries and travellers the Nandi may have appeared promiscuous they in fact possessed a well-ordered, even if somewhat unfamiliar, system of kinship and marriage. (p.68)

Yet ...the comments made by schoolboys in a questionnaire which I administered in 1973 left me in no doubt as to the promiscuity of their behavior. (p.83)

Copious references of predominately European authorship span the period 1906-1973. It is often difficult to determine whether certain rituals took place in 1906 or 1973. But there is no question about the date of the following:

Daughters of Christian parents become pregnant before marriage. Why? Elders of the church take second wives. Why? Christian men and women attend beer-drinks and circumcision parties. Why?.... Missionaries, teachers, and politicians vie with each other for the allegiance of Nandi youth. Confusion reigns. (p.127)

For someone not familiar with Black Africa -- East and West -- such customs as bride price (the exact opposite of dowry) or praise singers may appear to be a local Nandi ritual. Not so. But an interesting question does arise. Is it possible that here in the Kenyan highlands and valleys a custom such as praise singing has an unbroken continuity from the time of Saul and David? Bible readers will recall praise singers who aroused the ire of King Saul by their perception. Is it possible that such a custom goes back to the ancient kingdom of Kush (Cush? Sudan?) pre-dating the time of Saul and David?

There is merit in *The Nandi of Kenya*. Dr. Langley tiptoes around certain practices and avoids stating outright that there are initiation rites that are hardly less than female mutilation. But still readers deserve better because there are better books in print. Anyone interested in finding out what life is like in Kenya and what it feels like to be a Kenyan would be well served by selecting Ngugi over Langley.

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ANDREW STRATHERN, *ONGKA: A SELF ACCOUNT BY A NEW GUINEA BIG MAN*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979, 162 pp., \$19.95.

Ongka, A Self Account by a New Guinea Big Man is an oral narrative of the history and culture of a New Guinea big man named Ongka. A big man is a political leader within the Melpan culture of New Guinea. Ongka has served as a local government counsellor and is an outstanding political figure in his homeland. He presented his narrative to Andrew Strathern in the Melpan language via cassette recorder and Strathern translated his words into English.

Ongka's story takes place in the highland region of Papua, New Guinea. His home area is Mount Hagen. The staple crop is the sweet potato, and pigs are a main source of revenue. The Hagen people are from a polygynous culture and live in clans. The clan members link their origin to a single ancestral founder, territory and sacred oath substance.

Ongka is in his sixties at the time of this narrative when he sensitively describes the clan lifestyle from childhood to adulthood. He elaborates on the relationships of the men to their women and children. He includes a delightful discussion of their courting, marriage and divorce procedures. Ongka has five wives, thirteen children and seven grandchildren. He is considered to be successful in his homeland and periodically increases his family thusly, "women would come to me and say, you're a big man, let me marry you." Ongka agreed and married them. But later if he saw them running around with other men he told them, "to be off" and if there were any children, he kept them saying to the women, "you didn't bring these children with you when you came as a girl to me" and sent the women off to marry someone else if they liked.

Ongka also recounts significant events in his life such as his birth, birthplace, naming, his youth, his wives, family and work. He describes cultural traditions such as the ceremonies at his mother's death, his father, Kaepa's role as leader and warrior for the Kawaelka people, the usage of stone axe and