mit geographischen Publikationen zu tun hat, sind die zahlreichen hervorragenden Karten, Diagramme und Tabellen, die viele verwirrende Zusammenhänge anschaulich machen.

Es fällt schwer, an dieser Arbeit negative Kritikpunkte auszumachen. Das einzige inhaltliche Problem, das ich mit diesem Buch hatte, ist die Frage, inwiefern es tatsächlich die Situation auf allen Reservationen reflektieren kann. Frantz greift, wie erwähnt, weitgehend auf Beispiele aus dem Südwesten zurück, die er ausführlich diskutiert und deren Analyse er mehr oder weniger explizit für die gesamten USA verallgemeinert. In vielen Punkten scheint mir eine solche Verallgemeinerung zulässig, doch ein gewisses Unbehagen bleibt, ob dies in allen Aspekten tatsächlich der Fall ist.

Einige weitere kleine Schwächen sollen nicht unerwähnt bleiben. Im Kapitel über die Bevölkerungsentwicklung vermißt man Hinweise auf die Arbeiten von Russell Thornton, vor allem *American Indian holocaust and survival* (Norman, 1987), die aktuellste und umfassendste Abhandlung zu diesem Thema. Als Ethnologe stört man sich zudem an einem Begriff wie „Indianervölker“ oder an der unkritischen Verwendung des Begriffes „Stamm“, den man so wie Frantz in der Ethnologie nicht mehr verwenden würde. Seine Diskussion dieser Problematik (S. 86) ist sehr unbefriedigend. Recht unglücklich erscheint auch die gemischte deutsch-englische Schreibweise „Apachen“.


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This book presents the results of a long fieldwork carried out among the Beng people of Côte d'Ivoire. The Beng, whose language is Southern Mande, constitute an ethnic minority which numbers only 10,000. Due to historical circumstances, in particular the incursions of the Malinke conqueror Samory and, later, the recruitment campaign launched by the French in the framework of forced labour, the Beng have formed an "ethnic enclave" and see themselves as such. But they do not live in isolation from other ethnic groups with whom they are in direct contact. Their neighbours, with different descent systems, such as the Dyula (Northern Mande group), Djimini (a Senufo subgroup whose language belongs to the Gur family), Baule and Ando (Twi-speaking peoples), have cultural influences on the Beng.

Gottlieb attempts to analyse Beng life that is based on identity and difference, two opposite and complementary notions existing also as principles of organization in numerous domains of Beng society. The first chapter recounts briefly the origin of the Beng and their migration from present-day Ghana into Côte d'Ivoire, but it is largely devoted to theoretical issues. Although she refers several times to Claude Lévi-Strauss and to structuralism, Gottlieb declares that she had been inspired by David Schneider in her study of Beng kinship.

The second chapter analyses the Earth worship and the importance of the kapok tree which is seen as a key symbol in Beng society. The division of space between the "village" and the
“forest” (or the “Earth”) is one of the main thought instruments among the Beng and the author accounts for it in detail. Like most West African people, the Beng have a sacred conception of the Earth (ba). Beside its sacredness, Earth is considered to be a male entity associated with the forest and having friendly relationship with Sky, a female entity which is not an object of worship. Earth is divided into small units which are localized, named, and to whose divinities sacrifices are regularly made. Each portion of the Earth is controlled by a male matriclan chief acting as mediator between humans and divine entities.

The Beng kinship and their system of alliance are the domains of social organization which have been selected as suitable for analysing the principles of identity and difference (chapters three and four). This opposition can also be found inside the matriclans and patriclans. The matriclan (wola) is ideally an endogamous unit whose members share the same bodily components (breast milk, body odour, blood). Unlike the matriclans, patriclans (sia) are exogamous and their members have the same food taboos and the ability to wash corpse of co-members. In spite of its hybrid characteristic, it appears that the Beng kinship terminology is Crow, whereas the alliance system is the “semi-complex” form which is based on both prohibitions and preferences. As a matter of fact, “the Beng do have positive rules dictating marital alliances, but the system also includes a far-ranging set of negative rules that effectively undermine the potential effect of the positive rules” (p. 76). The birth order of girls is also of great interest in the Beng alliance system which combines proximity and distance. This system of birth order and the three forms of cousin marriage – matrilateral parallel-cousin and both types of cross-cousin – contribute to create a set of complex alliance possibilities among the Beng.

Issues related to cosmology, and regarding particularly myth and ritual, are discussed in the fifth chapter. Hyenas and dogs are the examples which enable the reader to understand the mythical expression of the Beng. Tales told in most of West African societies present Hyena as a symbol of stupidity. But this amusing feature is not the only one, for the Beng also consider Hyena as the Other who remains terrifying. Dogs are allies with men, although they are accused of “having bestowed death on humanity” (p.99).

Chapter six deals with the Beng world confronted with modernity and the process of transformation. The Beng “views of White people” is the less original section of this chapter. On the other hand, it is interesting to note that on the Beng territory, which is coffee, cocoa, cotton, cola-producing land, the ecological competition for controlling resources is becoming more and more acute because of Mossi, Dyula and Bamana immigrants. As a result, not only soil fertility is declining, but the Beng wonder about their ethnic identity, for the newcomers are not interested in learning their language. Unfortunately, Gottlieb, who limits herself to metaphysical interpretations, does not elaborate on this ecological perspective, one of the most enduring and fruitful issues in the analysis of ethnicity and which would have enabled the reader to understand more fully some modalities of inter-ethnic relationships in process among the Beng.

Some sections of this book, especially the theoretical issues (first chapter), are somewhat lengthy and consequently finding the main statement is sometimes difficult. On a minor point, the information according to which Binger, the French explorer, “visited the Beng region in 1889” is a mistake (see p.156, note 6). In fact, Binger visited the Senufo village Bengué which the authoress mistakes for the name Beng.

Nevertheless, this book, written in a very concise style, fills a gap in Mande studies.

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