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ELLIOTT P. SKINNER. The Mossi of the Upper Volta: The Political Development of a Sudanese People. Pp. ix, 236. Stanford University Press, 1964. \$6.50

From their beginnings, African studies have been divided into studies of native cultures by anthropologists and the work of political scientists and conventional historians concerned with European exploration and administration. But the central fact of Africa's story is the impact of Europe on African cultures; Mau Mau occurred because European regulations and actions ignored the structure and values of native society, especially Kikuyu land tenure. The similar, if less dramatic, events which make up so much of African history can be understood only when we have many books on both sides of the Afro-European contact.

Professor Skinner has produced such a book. It consists of 8 chapters on traditional Mossi society and 3 chapters on the European intrusion. It shows clearly how African-European contacts were distorted by the inability of either side to grasp the categories, meanings, and values within which ^{each} sought to live. As a result, any event had quite different significance to each. Europeans regard a battle as a contest of applied force, in which courage, tenacity, discipline, and similar virtues determine the outcome; to Africans the same battle may be settled by the wish or power of some spirit: a couple of casualties will reveal that spirit's wish and the afflicted side may break and run. To the European this reflects lack of courage; to the African it shows a sensible acceptance of the spirit's power. To Europeans political power is a synthesis of force, rewards, and ideological appeal; to the Mossi, like most Africans, political power is a combination of religious factors, hereditary rights, and reciprocal social relations. With such a

different outlook, no very meaningful dialogue can take place between Europeans and Africans on this subject.

Professor Skinner's materials show similar contrasts for the most basic features of Mossi life. Land ownership, an important factor in European social power, was never regarded as such by the Mossi, and was left to the enslaved aborigines. On the other hand, reciprocal interchange of women, as if they were private property, was the chief cohesive force in Mossi society, which began to disintegrate when the French, quite unaware of the situation, extended equal rights to women. The latter responded by refusing to be handed about, and the society began to fall apart without anyone knowing why. In a similar fashion, Christianity, by curtailing the rites associated with ancestor worship, tended to cancel ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ significant forces which made it possible for the Mossi rulers to direct the movements of their society. Information of this kind, although concerned with a single tribe, has considerable importance for the study of Africa and its problems as a whole.

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