

Zulu Transformations: A Study of the Dynamics of Social Change. Absolom VILAKAZI. Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1962. x-168 pp., appendix, bibliography, diagrams, glossary, maps. R. 1.75.

Zulu Transformations is billed as being written "from the inside". So it is, because Dr. Vilakazi is a Zulu, and a Christian, as well as a trained anthropologist. The book was initially presented as a doctoral thesis to the University of Natal, South Africa. Clearly, Vilakazi had no language difficulties; he also knew the history of the Zulu people and, before he commenced fieldwork, he had, no doubt, ideas on how his people had responded to western influences. But these advantages, if advantages they are, have not resulted in a study which helps us to understand the "dynamics of social change".

Vilakazi is a Christian with a capital C. What transformations have taken place are attributed to the introduction of Christianity which is treated as "by far the most important influence" (p. 11). While, no doubt, this is *one* important influence (of declining importance?) it is far from the only one of significance. I am not suggesting here that Vilakazi is unduly influenced by this conviction, because a good deal of his writing is descriptive and objectively analysed, but that his treatment of the dynamics of social change is very limited and that his main conclusion that "Christianity, westernization and urbanization are synonymous" is a gross over-simplification.

Vilakazi is concerned with two small Zulu-speaking peoples, the Nyuswa and the Qadi living in the Nyuswa Reserve in the Province of Natal. While the two tribes have a common origin, and share a good many structural features, their relations not infrequently erupt into open conflict. This is so because the Qadi were later arrivals and settled amongst the Nyuswa on land which the latter now need due to an increase in population. Today, it seems, both tribes have consolidated their individual identity through their respective chiefs.

The author has selected an institutional analysis of the dynamics of social change. Thus he deals with changes in the network and kinship system, marriage, the territorial framework, religion, education and economic life. In this presentation, Vilakazi consistently points to Christianity as the main change agent. He divides the people between traditionalists and Christians. Traditionalists are backward; Christians, because they have embraced education, are progressive: people who want to get on in the world! Traditionalists frequently neglect their kinship obligations, and often do not help strangers. Christians help everyone including traditionalists (p. 29). The bond among Christians is geared towards a personal respect for the individual; traditionalists are enmeshed in a web of kinship which often rides roughshod over people, i.e., the Zulu attitude that a woman is a minor. The traditional network breeds hostility between father and son and mother and daughter; the Christian home respects differences and hence is not so subject to disintegrative forces.

The traditionalist "remains essentially heathen in his world view"; the Christian "has a new explanation of his universe and a new religion which

supplies the reasons for all his actions" (p. 55) and in this way gives the African "a new basis for cultural and psychological integration" (p. 76). This is in contrast to the "insidious individualism" which has affected a distinct class among the Zulu, the "cultural driftwood" who are neither traditionalist nor Christian. Christianity, Vilakazi tells us, is the "new basis of cohesion" brought about by the "concept of the spiritual brotherhood of all Christian believers". (Why then the racial turmoil in South Africa?) He brushes aside the cynicism some Europeans attach to the statements some Africans make about having given up kinship bonds in favour of a Christian community. "I consider verbalizations important", he writes, "and legitimate aspects of behaviour and cannot, therefore, share the cynical view" (p. 97). Such interpretations, plus the view that the "Separatist churches [in South Africa] have never given social prestige to people" (p. 101), a totally false observation, will be read with considerable satisfaction by the present rulers of South Africa!

The great weakness of this book is that Vilakazi has paid very little attention to, what he admits in his last chapter, "the important role played by similar forces like the White government, industry and migratory labour" (p. 143). In terms of the dynamics of social change, Vilakazi places all eggs in one basket: "It is only the people who have accepted a new ideology and new explanations for social phenomena and who have therefore oriented themselves anew to life, who become changed men" (p. 137). But not all is well among these changed men because "The Christians or the westernized Zulu are marked by certain behavioural features which are an index of psychological isolation, loneliness and restlessness" such as the "hunt for sensual pleasures" (p. 141).

Mere urban residence, and the complex of economic and political forces, evidently does not have "any effect in changing the basic cultural patterns, values and outlook" (p. 146) of the traditionalists. A traditionalist remains a traditionalist — unless, of course, he becomes a Christian. The concept of urbanization, which the sociologist has adopted "uncritically", the author claims, "does not help sociological analysis" (p. 146). This, and much else, is hard to accept.

Zulu Transformations gives us an insight in how a Christian Zulu sees his people. As a contribution to the theory of social change it is of limited value.

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