H-Net Reviews in the Humanities & Social Sciences

James A. Pritchett. *Friends for Life, Friends for Death: Cohorts and Consciousness among the Lunda-Ndembu.* Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2007. xii + 266 pp. \$49.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8139-2624-7.

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This is the book, James Pritchett explains, that he intended to write during his early immersion in Lunda life in the Mwinilunga District of northwestern Zambia during the mid-1980s, a book that would capture "the immediacy of daily life, the raw sensorium of a culture that was not my own" (p. ix). The demands of guild membership decreed otherwise, and Pritchett's first work, The Lunda-Ndembu: Style, Change, and Social Transformation in South Central Africa (2001), conforms to the more traditional theoretical and analytical dictates of the anthropological discipline. Friends for Life may be all the better for its longer gestation, and while it does not entirely eschew an academic format, it breathes a refreshing freedom to explore the topics that most interest its author, the "bits and pieces" that did not find a way into his first book. The central figures in Pritchett's story-for it is in many ways a story rather than a monograph-are a "clique" of friends. They are not an "age group" in the classic sense; rather they are Amabwambu, friends by choice. Their responses to the dramatic changes over their lifetime provide the prism through which he presents Lunda experience. Pritchett argues that they understood these changes and adapted to them not simply as individuals and as members of kin groups but also very much as members of this self-selected cohort.

To set the scene, he devotes the first part of the book to the two generations that preceded the clique, the generation of the grandparents, *Ankaka*, and of the parents, *Ataata*, spanning the periods from about 1906-24 and 1924-48 respectively. Here he interweaves historical events with Lunda perceptions of them and how they reflect and alter core cultural beliefs. Oral traditions tend to focus on major players, "characters who have come to represent archetypes, moral types, and object lessons" (p. 57). Pritchett acknowledges that how he tells these stories is not how they would be told in the village settinghe has given structure to what would be "fragmented commentary, casual mentionings, and sporadic allusions to aspects of the lives and times" (p. 57) of personages who would already be well known to their audiences.

This format allows him, however, to depart from dry exposition of Lunda beliefs and social organization by personalizing it through the interaction with missionaries and colonial administrators and the responses of chiefs and ordinary people.

And what a cast of characters! In the first Muzungu generation there were the Fisher family, Plymouth Brethren missionaries, who founded the Kalene Mission; C. H. S. Bellis, the British South Africa Company tax collector who was shot dead at point-blank range by a local headman on his first tour; "One-Eyed Mack," Bellis's successor, to whom every evil act imaginable has been attributed; Bruce Miller, the very model of an enlightened Company official despite the enforcement of the hut tax and the beginnings of migrant labor to meet it. The tales of the next generation, the fathers of the Amabwambu, focus on Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth Patterson, who arrived from England in 1922 and soon dominated life on the Matonchi Plateau. Neither mission nor Company, Patterson built a pastoral and agricultural empire of his own, carrying out an unprecedented campaign of slaughter against the local fauna and mercilessly exploiting the native labor force pressed into his service. "He acted as a law unto himself, denigrating and marginalizing even Senior Chief Kanongesha," defying even the well-meaning Bruce Miller (p. 68). And yet all the fear and anxiety the Pattersons provoked was matched by their entertainment value: they were fun, "fun to think about, to talk about, to imitate, and to ridicule" (p. 70). Their deeds are still the stuff of stories, songs, poems, riddles, and skits performed around the campfire. But "new" Africans also take center stage in the tales of the Ataata, some of them, ironically, initiated into the modern world by service with the Pattersons. Thus "Bug," "Table," and "Towel" became big men in their own right. Others such as Mr. Jake and Isaac Nkemba left Lunda country for work in South Africa. Still others went back and forth to the Copperbelt and Lusaka, most notably "Waylesi," so called because he was the first to introduce the wireless to those back home on the plateau.

With part 2, Pritchett at last comes to his main topic, the Amabwandu, sons of the Ataata and grandsons of the Ankaka. These are roughly a dozen males, close friends for nearly four decades. They are all well educated, among the first graduates of St. Kizito, the Lwawu Mission school run by American Franciscans. Imbued with the innovative-not to say Americanized (even Midwestern)-spirit of the Friars, they have been pioneers in experimenting with new crops, new ways of processing old ones, and entrepreneurial activities generally. Significantly, they have stayed home, often becoming headmen and elders at an earlier stage of life than is customary, thanks to their evident drive and achievement. While Pritchett gives thumbnail sketches of these men, whom he has known intimately for some twenty years, he is more interested in searching for a "shared consciousness that is forged out of shared experiences and the collectively constructed meanings assigned to these experiences," that is an "interpretation of reality" (p. 93).

This is, as he admits, a tricky business since one has to allow for individual character and responses, for group interactions, and for the changing world in which they operate. He tackles it in a series of chapters on aspects of their lives, beginning with their attendance at St. Kizito; the advent of Harry Franklin's "saucepan" radio; the Federation; the impact of the Congo crisis across the border; the emergence of an independent Zambia; and finally the contemporary world of economic uncertainty. At times we lose sight of the cohort of friends while Pritchett is providing summaries of historical events. It is also unclear what purpose is served by the sidebar snippets of newspaper stories from the late 1960s and early '70s,

aside from giving something of the flavor of the times.

Indeed, Pritchett is more convincing as anthropologist than as colonial historian where one senses that a somewhat knee-jerk anti-colonialism leads him astray. He does not seem to be aware that taxes collected in the district were paid to the chief to maintain his court and administration, that the main burden of law enforcement fell on the chief, that members of the American mission did not need British permission to travel, and that Lunda were quite free to visit relatives across the border in Congo. His account of Kaunda's campaign visit to Mwinilunga is also completely erroneous: KK was not faced with armed opposition and did not retreat but appeared dressed like a be-togaed Roman Emperor for an entirely peaceful, if somewhat comic, visit. There are other baffling errors. Pritchett repeatedly refers to bamboo being used for house construction or as a cash crop, but bamboo does not grow in Mwinilunga. He also refers to the rainy season lasting seven or eight months, which is patently not the case: rains begin tentatively in early November and begin to tail off already in February.

Nevertheless, when the focus in on the group of friends, the material is unfailingly interesting and a welcome change from abstract discussions of the impact of change on indigenous societies. Pritchett writes with clarity and elan. Even the occasional obligatory forays into theory are blessedly free of jargon. He is a born storyteller, perhaps part of the mutual attraction between him and his Lunda hosts. One imagines that even now he and his family are the subject of stories and skits around the fire–stories far more affectionate than those about the demon Patterson.

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