and San. This could have been made clearer in the title, because the term Mande is vague and can even be misleading on several accounts. As a linguistic category it refers to two different things, a large language family and one of the languages in this family, and it also encourages shifts from linguistic, to geographic, to cultural contexts, and to extrapolations which are better avoided. Some populations speaking Mande languages, such as the Bisa, do not have "Mande" blacksmiths at all, while other Voltaic-speaking communities do. The author recognizes some of these problems in the preface, but like other people who have worked in central Mali has a tendency to go back and forth between the broadest and the most restricted senses of the term "Mande".

McNaughton displays impressive control of the sources, including the vast early Francophone literature on the area, and frames the discussion of almost every concept with a critical review of the exegesis of prior authors in the light of his own fieldwork. Both regional specialists and a wider audience will also appreciate the book for descriptions that have an admirable technical precision and thoroughness. They also have the rare power to convey atmosphere and life, as for example when the author explains how blacksmiths play bellow rhythms in counterpoint to neighborhood women who pound their mortar with a hand clapping routine and occasionally throw their pestles up into the air.

The beautiful production of the book is worthy of its content. It is copiously illustrated with 77 black and white plates, including many line drawings and eight colour plates.

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**Mahir Saul**

**Hallgren, Roland, The Good Things in Life. A study of the traditional religious culture of the Yoruba people, Löberöd, Bokiforlaget Plus Ultra, 1988, 197 pp., 91 86668 226.**

Quite often, Western researchers fall prey to the assumption that there is a major value or motif that can be said to characterise a particular African culture. Whatever other values or motifs the people have are thus ignored in the attempt to build stereotypes from the dominant value. Hallgren's work is grounded in this assumption.

*Journal of Religion in Africa*  **XX, 3 (1990)**
Although he does recognise several motifs in Yoruba religion, for him the dominant one is that of fertility. He sees the moods, the behaviour, the thoughts and the actions of the Yoruba, whether manifested in prayers, in songs, in consultations with diviners, or in their belief system generally, as rooted in their concerns over fertility. Indeed, take these concerns from their lives and, it would seem from this analysis, the Yoruba do not have any other problems.

Chapter One to Seven of the book deliver only one verdict: there is a pervasive concern about fertility. The material analysed moves from myths to proverbs, to *ijala* poetry, to naming systems. The method of analysis involves selected opinions and judgements which confirm the author's interest. Chapter One examines Yoruba beliefs in God and the Orisa. The pantheon is seen as expressing Yoruba plurality, but as nevertheless manifesting common Yoruba motifs and attitudes to life. Chapter Two is entitled "Aspect of the Belief System", thereby conveying the false impression that other chapters are not about aspects of a belief system. This chapter considers the practices of ancestral worship, the *egungun* (masquerades), sacrifice and the Ogbon i cult. The analysis benefits a great deal from Peter Morton-Williams' analysis of Oyo Yoruba cosmological structure as embracing orun (sky/heaven), aye (world) and ile (earth/afterworld) (P. Morton-Wiliams, 1964, "An outline of the cosmology and cult organisation of the Oyo Yoruba", *Africa* 34). The interrelationship of these concepts in Yoruba thought, the author concludes, is also connected with the Yoruba preoccupation with life and the need to control the impact of death. The sky/heaven and the earth/underworld are equated in different theories of rebirth and in the importance of the ancestors for "the good life".

In Chapter Three, we begin to focus upon narrative texts: riddles, proverbs and stories. The study of these texts complements Chapter Two, since they demonstrate that human life can benefit from the actions of the Orisa and the ancestors in the underworld. However, by Chapter Four we understand that human problems can be resolved through the mediating influence of diviners, who link their clients directly to the sky/heaven by means of the *Ifa* corpus. The rest of the book then highlights how the universe and its power can be controlled by words of power in proverbs (Chapter Five), in poetry (Chapter Six) and in personal names (Chapter