



Of Revelation and Revolution, Volume 2: The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier

John L. Comaroff, Jean Comaroff

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In the second of a proposed three-volume study, John and Jean Comaroff continue their exploration of colonial evangelism and modernity in South Africa. Moving beyond the opening moments of the encounter between the British Nonconformist missions and the Southern Tswana peoples, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, Volume II, explores the complex transactions—both epic and ordinary—among the various *dramatis personae* along this colonial frontier.

The Comaroffs trace many of the major themes of twentieth-century South African history back to these formative encounters. The relationship between the British evangelists and the Southern Tswana engendered complex exchanges of goods, signs, and cultural markers that shaped not only African existence but also bourgeois modernity "back home" in England. We see, in this volume, how the colonial attempt to "civilize" Africa set in motion a dialectical process that refashioned the everyday lives of all those drawn into its purview, creating hybrid cultural forms and potent global forces which persist in the postcolonial age.

This fascinating study shows how the initiatives of the colonial missions collided with local traditions, giving rise to new cultural practices, new patterns of production and consumption, new senses of style and beauty, and new forms of class distinction and ethnicity. As noted by reviewers of the first volume, the Comaroffs have succeeded in providing a model for the study of colonial encounters. By insisting on its dialectical nature, they demonstrate that colonialism can no longer be seen as a one-sided relationship between the conquering and the conquered. It is, rather, a complex system of reciprocal determinations, one whose legacy is very much with us today.

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