

Symbols of Death: An Analysis of the Consciousness of the Karanga By Herbert Aschwanden, transl. by U. Cooper. Shona Heritage Series 4. Gweru, Mambo Press, 1987, 389 pp., ISBN 0-86922 390-9, Z\$20.25.

Karanga Mythology: An Analysis of the Consciousness of the Karanga in Zimbabwe By Herbert Aschwanden, transl. by U. Cooper. Shona Heritage Series 5. Gweru, Mambo Press, 1989, 287 pp., ISBN 0-86922 450-6, Z\$18.

These two volumes complete a trilogy about symbolism based on investigations into oral traditions of the Karanga people of Ndanga and Bikita districts in Masvingo. In the previous volume, *Symbols of Life*, the author examined issues like birth, childhood, sex, marriage. In *Symbols of Death*, he discusses the causes and onset of death and subsequent rituals. In the last volume, *Karanga Mythology*, he analyses myths. In all cases he was helped by nursing sisters to collect information from patients at a mission hospital where he worked as a doctor.

The author pursues a style of description and analysis, whereby he first presents the narratives of rituals in the second volume and myths in the third volume. The narratives are followed by an interpretation which unearths a cosmological dimension. The author is able to articulate the significance of his research findings from the Karanga point of view: 'an analysis of consciousness . . . of the Karanga . . . is presented to the reader strictly in the light of the Karanga's own statements and analysis' (*Symbols of Death*, 11). Also, by putting into writing the social and cultural beliefs of the Karanga, the author has systematised often fragmentary oral tradition.

However, there are some weaknesses in the work. One problem area lies with the use of translation of the Karanga issues through his assistants. Translation deprives the material of its original meaning and does not penetrate the linguistic and cultural codes of the people under study. Also, the translation into Christian terms and concepts like 'sin' reflects the author's, or his helpers', prejudice.

The second problem is the level of analysis, limited by the methods of collecting data from patients, outside the context in which the symbols are used. Aschwanden admits, 'I am also conscious of the fact that the interpretation of some symbols and rituals is inadequate and that the Karanga's far deeper understanding of them has remained undiscovered by us' (*Symbols of Death*, 11).

On the whole, Aschwanden's books try to provide basic information on the Karanga oral tradition which is valuable for social and cultural anthropologists, sociologists, historians, and researchers in indigenous religions and culture.