
Lemaire, Marianne. – *Les sillons de la souffrance*

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- 1 *Les sillons de la souffrance* is a richly documented ethnography that focuses on the range of activities and meanings associated with the word *faliwi* among the Tyebara, a Senufo sub-group in the region of Korhogo in Côte-d'Ivoire. As Lemaire points out, *faliwi* can only very approximately be translated as "work". Some activities which we would consider "work", such as food preparation, are not considered *faliwi*, which can however include ritual activities which do not fall into the category of "work". In all cases, *faliwi* implies some form of suffering, whether physical or moral—the physical suffering of cultivating a field with a hoe, or the moral suffering of mourning and funeral ritual.
- 2 The paradigmatic form of *faliwi* is (primarily but not exclusively male) agricultural labor. The value of such labor is embodied in the figure of the *tegbanwi*, the champion cultivator in the village, the young man who in a competition can hoe a furrow fastest and straightest and whose yam mounds are the stoutest and largest. In inter-village contexts, when for example a party from the prospective groom's village is preparing a field for his future in-laws, the *tegbanwi* of each village competes against the other. The opposite of the *tegbanwi* is the *kanwolowi*, one who lags behind, not through laziness but from a disinterest in competition. (Paradoxically, Lemaire points out, the *tegbanwi* is often too involved in competition to tend his own fields properly, while the *kanwolowi* is generally a successful farmer). The chapter on work and music is particularly successful in its rich depiction of the fundamental ambivalence of Senufo values about

work. Lemaire analyzes both the texts of women's songs and the men's xylophone melodies which, by reproducing the tonal structure of utterances, reproduce a coded text. Such texts may encourage rivalry and exalt the *tegbanwi*, but they may also deprecate them and suggest that rivalry has its costs and its limits.

- 3 Half the book is devoted, not to agricultural but to ritual work, as well as ritual prohibitions on work : an individual's personal spirit's "market day", when he or she may not labor in the fields, but also broader prohibitions, particularly those associated with the *sandogi* society, which may extend to the interdiction of all agricultural labor—an interdiction particularly likely among men to afflict a *tegbanwi*. The book concludes with the work of the so-called secret societies, the men's *poro* but especially the *sandogi*, whose members are on the contrary mostly women. Indeed, differences in the gendered experience of "work" are a leitmotif throughout the book, with Lemaire suggesting that, very broadly but hardly in any absolute sense, men's work is more likely to involve physical suffering, and women's work moral suffering, a theme reflected as well in their songs.
- 4 Perhaps the most startling feature of this book about "work" is its near total silence on the subject of the economy. In passing, the reader may glean that the cultivation of rice has tended to supplant millet, or learn that the only songs with words sung by men are performed when outsiders come to appraise cotton for purchase. These songs which literally deprecate women, are thinly veiled insults aimed at the appraisers who systematically assess the cotton as inferior in order to purchase it at less than its value. Indeed, Lemaire's central contention is that the values embodied in *faliwi*, however gendered and ambivalent, are essentially anti-economic. Unfortunately, such a blanket portrayal of core Senufo values as "uneconomic" mirrors the very colonial stereotypes of the Senufo which she so eloquently critiques at the outset of the book. The progressive adoption of cotton and, to an important extent, rice as cash crops, as one can infer only by reading in between the lines of the book, belie any such characterization. By radically dichotomizing "work" and economy, Lemaire ultimately succeeds in removing the Senufo from history, in spite of her real and sincere attempts to take history into account. Even so, this remains a very sensitive and perceptive account of the cultural meanings of agricultural and ritual labor among the Tyebara.