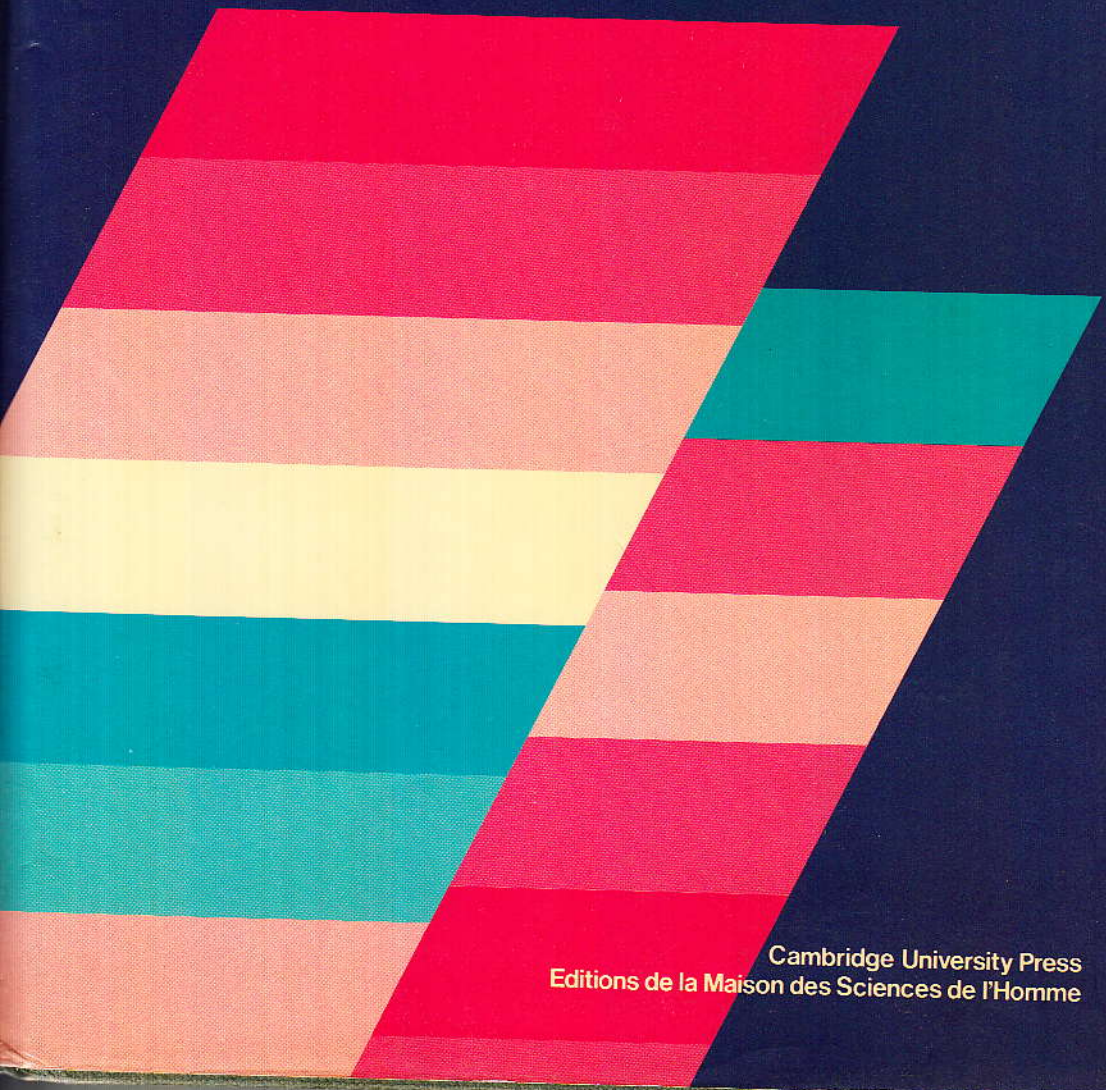


Dual classification reconsidered

Nyamwezi sacred kingship
and other examples

SERGE TCHERKÉZOFF



Cambridge University Press
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The deep structure of symbolism in religious and ritual activities has hitherto mostly been studied from perspectives deriving from classical and contemporary Western thought, which values symmetry, non-contradiction, equality of terms, and the rationality of linear discourse, and classification systems have therefore come to be defined in binary terms (right/left, male/female, black/white). In this book, Serge Tcherkézoff presents a new perspective on the study of ritual classification.

On the basis of a detailed ethnography of the rituals of the Nyamwezi of Tanzania, and a reassessment of comparative material from Africa, China, and North America, Tcherkézoff argues for an analysis which recognises contradictions and asymmetry within ritual systems. Following Dumont, he shows that societies are characterized by a hierarchical structure of values, in which each individual element has a meaning only through its position within the whole, thereby replacing the rigid classical structuralist dichotomy with a rich multi-dimensional approach.

This new perspective on a classical problem in anthropology will appeal to anthropologists and others interested in the study of symbolism.

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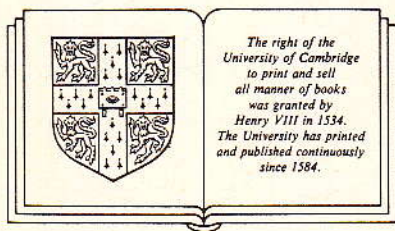
DUAL CLASSIFICATION RECONSIDERED

*Nyamwezi sacred kingship and
other examples*

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Preface

This comparative study belongs to a collective research project directed by Louis Dumont and Daniel de Coppet and based at the RCP 436 of the *Centre national de la recherche scientifique* in Paris, which considers the relation, in a given society, between the patterns assumed by the hierarchy of values and those which feature in the circuits of ceremonial exchange. It is based upon a shorter, unpublished study (1977: *Diplôme d'études approfondies*, under the supervision of Marc Augé, at the *École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales*) of Nyamwezi classification, which had made use of the method developed by Masao Yamaguchi in his study of Jukun symbolism (see chapter 4 note 7 below). These arguments were discussed at the RCP's seminar (*Atelier d'anthropologie sociale*), and also at seminars led by Louis Dumont and by Marc Augé. I would like to thank the participants at these seminars for their suggestions, which have enabled me to broaden my discussion. I have drawn heavily upon Louis Dumont's works in my own analysis, and his comments, his encouragement, and the interest he has taken in my research have played a crucial part in stimulating me and in helping me to complete this book. My intellectual debt to Claude Lévi-Strauss is self-evident. I would never even have conceived of this book had it not been for the ever-renewed sense of discovery that my reading of *The savage mind*, and of the other pages devoted by him to the logic of classification, has aroused in me. It is Claude Lévi-Strauss's work which provides the context for the investigations into aspects of the structural method that I have sought to develop here.

I would like here to thank Cécil Barraud, Daniel de Coppet, Marie-Jo Jamous and Raymond Jamous, who have very kindly read through various drafts of this book.