

ben Händlern, Boutiquenbesitzern und Konsumenten, deren Wege in Afrika und/oder Amerika sich mit den ihren gekreuzt haben und die die Vielfalt der Positionen und Haltungen im Globalisierungsprozess und bei den Versuchen der Anpassung widerspiegeln.

Ilsemargret Luttmann

Romberg, Raquel: *Witchcraft and Welfare. Spiritual Capital and the Business of Magic in Modern Puerto Rico*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003. 315 pp. ISBN 0-292-77126-6. Price: £ 18.95

The return of the Caribbean, since the 1980s, as a central location in anthropological enquiry, is a result of the region's centuries long history of transnationalism, dislocation of peoples, creolisation, hybridity, and syncretism. Many of the theoretical issues currently raised in the literature on globalisation, thus have a long and tormented, but also fascinating and colourful, past in the lived experiences of the region.

One of the most popular subject areas in Caribbean studies is folk religion, or spiritual beliefs and related practices – from the Shango cult in Trinidad to *voudun* in Haiti. Raquel Romberg's book is a study of *brujería* or witchcraft-healing in Puerto Rico, the smallest of the Great Antilles and an island with a unique history: Spanish until 1898, it has since then been under US administration, and although it is still entirely Spanish-speaking, a century of domination by, as well as extensive communication and exchange with, the USA, has left its mark. Romberg sets out to develop a genealogy for Puerto Rican *brujería*, to describe its present expressions and cultural significance, and to indicate its relationship with "mainstream" Puerto Rican society.

The historical part of the book traces the origins and multilayered development of Puerto Rican folk religion and popular healing systems back to the early years of Spanish colonization, noting that the European conquest coincided in time with the beginning of the Inquisition – the *Malleus Maleficarum* preceded Columbus's first voyage by only five years. Illicit and dangerous, ritual practices outside the control of the Church nevertheless took hold, evolving over the centuries through enriching impulses from Native American and African belief systems, Protestantism and, more recently, New Age eclecticism. In the contemporary era, described as a period of "spiritual laissez-faire and the commodification of faith," the "little tradition" of *brujería* has flourished, and its "array of disparate religious icons and beliefs" can be openly displayed and marketed. The *botánica*, or herbalist's shop, stands as a symbol for both the commercialism and increasingly complex syncretic mix of contemporary *brujería*; mass-produced concoctions, some of them in aerosol bottles, are sold alongside figurines of the Virgin, local herbs, and posters of Ganesh, expressing the symbolic opulence or "excess of iconicity in Afro-Latin worship."

Much of the book is spun around the activities of Romberg's main informant, a middle-aged *bruja* called

Haydée, whose healing methods, beliefs, competitive and complementary relationship to other kinds of healers, skills in dealing with local government and giving commonsensical advice, give a vivid picture of the range of competence represented in the witch-healer: He or she is doctor, marriage councillor, legal adviser, priest, and social worker in one person.

The *bruja/brujo*'s cleansing and healing rituals involve herbs, small animals, incense, fruit, incantations, and potions. They can help rectify injustices suffered at work or at home, heal physical ailments (a disproportionate number appear to have trouble with their legs), depressions, marital troubles, and so on. At a general level, the practices described by Romberg resemble alternative, traditional, and/or syncretic healing practices operating in many societies, especially those exposed to influences from Christianity and African religions.

The power struggles between *brujos*, documented by Romberg (although not central to the argument), indicate that they represent an alternative source of political power, wedged between local government, the legal system, the Church, and Western medicine. This is familiar enough from other societies where shamans or priest-healers have a central place. What makes Puerto Rico special as a case, is chiefly the strong embeddedness of its inhabitants in modern bureaucracy and consumer capitalism. During the second half of the 20th century, the island was not only increasingly dominated by US bureaucratic institutions, but it also went through an unprecedented economic growth period, establishing mass consumerism as part of the lifestyle. The *brujo/bruja* can thus assert his or her power through conspicuous consumption and private opulence, and also, increasingly, finds a professional niche in helping clients obtain wealth by spiritual means.

One of Romberg's informants says that "nobody believes in it, but everyone agrees that it works." Functional explanations are always close at hand when phenomena of this kind are being examined, but Romberg does not even consider them; she also critically discusses and discards distinctions between authentic and inauthentic forms (although she admits being slightly upset when Haydée dressed up as a North American witch, pointed black hat and pale makeup, at Halloween), and concludes that *brujería* can fill an existential void in the otherwise compartmentalised, fragmented, and morally meaningless public sphere of a modern society. It offers coherence and depicts a world where morality and trust matter.

"Witchcraft and Welfare" is a delightful and insightful book, evocative and well-written, which unpacks the multilayered history of Puerto Rican folk beliefs and practices, convincingly showing not only how *brujería* makes sense in people's everyday lives, but also how it is becoming institutionalised as an integral part of official Puerto Rican society, and indeed how beliefs and practices of this kind can be complementary, not opposed, to bureaucratic rationality. Romberg's greatest achievement, however, consists in showing how *brujería* has evolved, both in form and social significance, over

the centuries, thereby adding a new dimension to the social history of Puerto Rico.

Thomas Hylland Eriksen

Rösing, Ina: *Trance, Besessenheit und Amnesie. Bei den Schamanen der Changpa-Nomaden im ladakhischen Changthang.* Gnas: Herbert Weishaupt Verlag, 2003. 270 pp. ISBN 3-7059-0174-5. Preis: € 42,90

This work raises some provocative theoretical points, includes fascinating descriptions of Ladakhi seances, and, with its clearly written prose, large print, and extensive set of full-color photographs, will be an excellent introduction to Ladakhi oracles for nonspecialist readers and novice students in psychological anthropology. It will undoubtedly generate interest among those enthusiastic for “alternative” healing techniques, an audience clearly courted by the author. More academically-minded specialists, whether Tibetologists or cultural anthropologists, may, however, be frustrated by Rösing’s breathtaking generalizations, the book’s scarcity of precise data, and by the extremely short time actually spent in the field – a few weeks altogether among nomads of the Changthang, an expeditiousness only partially offset by longer periods in the settled communities and monastic settlements of Ladakh.

The first two chapters review some of the literature on the environment and nomadic life of the Ladakhi Changthang, the high grasslands southeast of Leh also known as the Rupshu Valley. Given the paucity of data on this area (the area is tightly controlled by India’s military limiting travel permits to one week at a time), most of this introductory material relies on the better documentation regarding nomads in Tibet proper. The review in these chapters sometimes includes settled Tibetan communities as well, such as in the discussion of polyandry, a short section launched with a footnote remarkably containing 69 references (66). This fascination is noteworthy not only because it is the only such instance – many significant works on Tibetan oracles are overlooked, some by the same authors who are cited on polyandry – but also because Rösing nevertheless adds no new information to this topic, nor does she develop the connections between nomadic kinship/social structure and healing practices that this atypical thoroughness might lead one to expect.

Chapter 3 introduces Ladakhi village “shamans,” as the author prefers to distinguish village or nomadic *lha-pa* while reserving the ordinary translation “oracle” for monastic *lha-pa*, despite their similar identities. Several personal histories are shown to share a key feature of how their initial “craziness” (*Wahnsinn*) is professionally transformed as the possessing agency is gradually recognized to be a benevolent rather than a malevolent entity. It is the responsibility of a high lama ultimately to authenticate the shaman, by issuing a letter to this effect; the shaman learns to accept and control states of possession, and to use them only within properly sanctioned contexts. Of particular note is the observation that possession is only possible with a weak life

force (a weak *psycho-immunologische Verfassung*, 140). These personal vignettes of shamans and commentaries by lamas are fascinating, and a three page appendix later offers a concise comparison between the settled Ladakhi oracles who are described in this chapter and those found among the nomads of the Changthang. This material would be even more interesting were we to learn something about the patients, their conditions, whether they report improvement following treatment, of what other treatment options are open to them, or what their understanding of the oracles may be.

Focusing instead on the “puzzle” of posttrance amnesia, chapter 4 draws a set of six radical conclusions regarding Ladakhi shamans (151–153): the Ladakhi shaman is a healing expert without healing knowledge; Ladakhi healers cannot teach; Ladakhi healers act without responsibility; the physician-patient contact limits itself to one minute per patient; the highest quality distinguishing characteristic of the healers is unstable; the knowledge of the healers cannot be researched. This last conclusion obviously presents an “enormous obstacle to research” (*grandiose[s] Forschungshindernis*, 153) in response to which Rösing develops a strategy that she calls, using English, “recycling the waste,” an intriguingly named methodology unfortunately insufficiently explained to allow for comment here.

Much of Rösing’s analysis revolves around her initial hypothesis, which she eventually rejects, that Ladakhi shamans feign amnesia once their trances are over as an avoidance strategy (*Abwehrstrategie*), to resist being cross-examined by researchers. Rösing seeks to test this hypothesis by finding the “most remote” nomadic oracle “uncontaminated” by any contact with outsiders, which finally takes her, in chapter 5, into the Changthang on two short, hectic forays. She finds two such shamans, but the hypothesis, the “unresearchability” of the shamans, and all other efforts to clarify concepts such as trance or possession – all the rest of the research agenda in fact – all fade away in the flash of a “key experience.” In this epiphany, Rösing ceases to think rationally, logically, or scientifically, but instead intuitively and emotionally realizes that a shamanic trance *can* truly be authentic: “Ich habe ‘begriffen’, und zwar nichts links-hemisphärisch, rational, logisch oder wissenschaftlich, sondern rechts-hemisphärisch, intuitiv, emotional, ja nahezu trance-infiziert – dass die schamanische Trance etwas absolut Authentisches sein *kann*” (italics in original, 182). Unfortunately, this experience, she herself admits, doesn’t help us learn what trance is or why posttrance amnesia occurs, but it does lead her to ask a “burning” new question (novel enough to the author to exclaim it in full capital letters): “WAS HAT ER GESAGT?” What did he (the shaman) say? (184). The answer to this question, which costs the author “a year-long monumental research effort,” forms the final chapter.

For Rösing this last chapter forms the book’s core and culminating point (*Kern und Höhepunkt*, 37); for this reviewer, it forms its central paradox. Rösing seeks a word-for-word translation and finds frustrating the long stories, episodes, and many digressive associations that