

tonics, subduction, and plate elasticity, the strengths of transverse sea currents and similar factors in estimating distances to be crossed and the ensuing difficulties. His suggestion that Wallacean sea crossings were hampered because “people could not see their destination” (96) indicates he has not even been to the area, because from Java to Timor, the destination shore was clearly and easily visible prior to each of the several crossings made. That was not the problem, the problem was that the navigation of these sea narrows is a lot trickier than armchair archaeologists would envisage. But these matters have all been investigated and clarified, so why did Webb not simply type “Pleistocene seafaring” into Google to see what is available? His extensive discussion of maritime travel, of watercraft size and construction, supplies and required technology, so central to the subject of his book, occurs in such a complete vacuum of relevant knowledge that it has to be simply disregarded. He claims that the discovery of *H. floresiensis* has overturned the idea that “Middle Pleistocene hominids [he means of course hominins, using both terms indiscriminately throughout] have always been denied the intelligence to manipulate their world” (95); that putative species is certainly not of the Middle Pleistocene, and we have yet to see agreement among the pundits about the taxonomic status of this “species.” His map 3.3, of the migration patterns and genetic mixing through Indonesia, shows a network of lines and arrows drawn across all islands that is completely fictional. We have no evidence to justify any part of this network, and it may take a century or two to secure the data for this kind of model.

The second half of the book, concerned mostly with the Pleistocene remains of humans in Australia, is much more worthwhile, and in places presents superb information. The two hominin finds from the Lake Eyre basin (161 ff.), the discussion of burnt bone (171), or the details of Willandra Lake interment practices (219 ff.) are all very informative and convey the crispness of personal experience, which is so obviously lacking in the rest of the book.

Essentially, Webb has tried to tackle some of what he calls the “hard questions,” but his lack of familiarity with the relevant literature covering many of these questions has only yielded an inadequate result, except where he relied on his own research. It would have been preferable if he had confined himself to his own area of expertise.

Robert G. Bednarik

Westerlund, David: African Indigenous Religions and Disease Causation. From Spiritual Beings to Living Humans. Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 2006. 237 pp. ISBN 978-90-04-14433-0. (Studies of Religion in Africa, 28) Prize: € 76.00

The book is a study of African disease aetiologies written by an expert in the history of religion. Westerlund approaches the theme of the book not only from a historical perspective, covering sources mostly from the twentieth century, but also from ethnographic, anthropological, and theological viewpoints.

Westerlund’s overall approach is comparative. He selected five ethnic groups from various parts of Africa, which represent different types of social and cultural organization. The San are hunters and gatherers who have no centralized sociopolitical structure. The Maasai are pastoralists with a slightly more complex sociopolitical organization than the San. The Sukuma, the Kongo, and the Yoruba are mainly agriculturalists. They differ from each other in terms of cultural complexity. The author can be credited with presenting in concise chapters a differentiated and complex image of the social, cultural, and economic organization of the five ethnic groups, as well as their history. He pays close attention to their religious beliefs and expressions. The rich ethnographic details are particularly engaging. These aspects are then related to how disease causation is conceptualized in each group.

In the introduction the author lays out the structure of the book, which has roughly three parts. First, Westerlund presents details on African understandings that supernatural beings – deities, ancestral spirits, and other spirit-beings – are responsible for diseases. Second, he turns to beliefs that attribute human agents with blame for illness. He strongly, but not exclusively, focuses on witchcraft, sorcery, and curses. However, I missed in this section a reference to conspiracy theories, which are a modern development of witchery beliefs. Third, he analyzes possible reasons for the frequently observed shift among African ethnic groups from causal explanations of illness involving supernatural beings to causal explanations pointing at human agents as the cause of illness. Finally, he adds some notes on the natural causation of illness. The author regards these different types of causal explanations of disease as ideal types that in reality generally overlap. In other words, diseases are generally thought to be caused by multiple factors.

It is very helpful to the reader that Westerlund throughout the book explains his terminology. For example, he does not use the distinction between illness and disease, which is common in medical anthropology, and subsequently uses the two terms synonymously. Throughout the book the high quality of his scholarship becomes evident in his critical evaluation of the sources he uses. He presents and interprets contradicting statements in different sources. At times, he traces contradictory sources to research done at different periods of time. He concludes that shifts in disease aetiologies occurred, mainly because of social, political, and economic changes as well as the growing influence of Christianity and Islam. While I miss some of the more current literature from medical anthropology, Westerlund draws on other sources that are frequently ignored by anthropologists, such as archives of missionary organizations. Further, he refers to historic publications, such as “Der Ursprung der Gottesidee” by Wilhelm Schmidt (Münster 1912–1955) that are currently rarely drawn upon.

Chapters two to six focus on beliefs concerning illness causation through supernatural beings. The rich ethnographic details make a pleasant reading but at times

lack a deeper analysis. Westerlund avoids presenting an abstracted model of the worldview of an ethnic group but often reminds the reader of differences in viewpoints among members of a single group and the heterogeneity of their beliefs. He frequently refers to the conflict between generalized models and the diversity of ethnographic evidence. Perhaps it might have been better, had he not pointed out this fact repeatedly; a clear statement in the introduction would have been sufficient.

Positive in these chapters is that he structures them according to the religious worldview of the selected five ethnic groups. For instance, he discusses first the supreme deity followed by presenting ancestral spirits and other supernatural beings, if worshipping the deity is central in the cosmology of the ethnic group. The order is reversed if in an ethnic group beliefs and rituals concerning the ancestors are more in the foreground. After presenting the basic characteristics of their religious beliefs and practices, he shows for each ethnic group how these relate to cultural understandings of the aetiology of disease.

A minor point of criticism is that Westerlund portrays traditional forms of religion but refers to traditions of a more recent provenience, such as Christianity and Islam, only in passing, unless these exhibit similar patterns in disease aetiologies and cures with “traditional” religions. It seems that the author views Christianity and Islam not as “African indigenous religions.” This raises the tricky question what is indigenous and what not. My discussions with people from southern Africa, who regard Christianity and Islam as part of “their” tradition, would render his view problematic. However, Westerlund might have found in his sources evidence contrary to what I found in my own data.

Chapters seven and eight discuss human agents of disease and misfortune in the five ethnic groups. The author gives examples of how humans can inflict harm onto each other, such as witchcraft, sorcery, and curses, and indicates distinctions between the different cultural groups. He observes substantial changes over time regarding who is thought to be responsible for certain illnesses.

In chapter nine, as elsewhere in the book, he indicates another change, namely that over time local explanations of disease in terms of malicious human agency increased at the expense of attributing supernatural beings with causal force. He argues that witchery reproduces itself hand-in-hand with modern changes. Urbanization, political rivalry, economic inequality, social stratification, and other factors provide a fertile ground for witchery ideas and practices.

Concluding, he informs the reader that the significance of the category of natural causation increased in many parts of Africa, and argues that this shift is related to the influence of Christianity and Islam on indigenous worldviews, the modern education and health care, and other factors. He argues that in current works by anthropologists and scholars of religion, the occurrence of natural causes for illnesses and methods of curing with natural substances is not prominent. While this statement

contains some truth, it is, however, not entirely correct. For example, the renowned medical anthropologist Edward Green strongly argues in “Indigenous Theories of Contagious Disease” (Walnut Creek 1999) that natural explanations of illness are central in non-Western aetiological systems, including African worldviews.

Overall, the book is a very carefully researched and thoroughly thought-through study. There are, however, a couple of problematic mistakes, typos, and editorial decisions in the text. For example, he emphasizes on page nine that scholarship needs to be thorough and careful, referring to the German language term “Gründlichkeit.” However, he spells the word without the German umlaut contradicting precisely the point he wants to make. Perhaps he deliberately removed the umlaut, as it is sometimes done in the English language, what is awkward in this case. At least twice in the text he mentions “Urmonotheismus” but omits the “h.” My first thought was that he intentionally followed the spelling in the original text, but even the original source spells the word with “th.” Awkward is that he sometimes did not translate uncommon German language terms into English, such as “altbuschmännisch” on page 44. Difficult are also some of his orthographic decisions that do not follow the common standard. For instance, he refers to a San group as the “Kung” instead of the generally used “!Kung.” Confusing is that sometimes foreign language terms are set in italics and sometimes not. Finally, the subtitle of the book is a bit awkward. Only after reading the introduction the meaning of “from spiritual beings to living humans” became clear to me.

These few shortcomings, however, do not diminish the quality of this book. Overall, Westerlund clearly and carefully lays out his arguments and supports them convincingly through reference to an abundance of sources. Everyone interested in religion in Africa, African disease aetiologies, and their changes over time will benefit from this well researched and easy readable valuable publication. Thus, it is disappointing that the publisher sells the book at an exorbitantly high price.

Alexander Rödlach

Whiteford, Linda, and Scott Whiteford (eds.): *Globalization, Water, and Health. Resource Management in Times of Scarcity*. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press; Oxford: James Currey, 2005. 322 pp. ISBN 978-1-930618-58-9; ISBN 978-0-85255-974-1. Price: £ 16.95

“Globalization, Water, and Health” contributes to the literature on water by exploring complex linkages between three topics that are traditionally addressed separately; it thereby challenges conventional paradigms and solutions. The volume is unusually valuable to scholars, students, practitioners, and policymakers around the world because case studies of both developed and developing countries are included, with most chapters containing comparisons of both. The overarching goal of the book – to convince academics, practitioners, and policymakers of the importance of reestablishing a