

cambios de forma (*shape-shifting*) en animales u otros poderes.

Los principios transformadores son analizados en capítulo 3 en el contexto de los rituales de casamiento, el ritual central, que crea una complementaridad masculina/femenina, que no sólo transforma a los individuos sino también a las comunidades. Formas de parentesco ritual, como la adopción y el compadrazgo, se expresan a través de una transformación de la sustancia del individuo por medio de la acción ritual, el compartir y la reciprocidad, por la cual los afines se convierten en consanguíneos. Estas relaciones conectan a los individuos a través de redes de contacto que cubren toda la región (capítulo 4). El último capítulo analiza el levantamiento indígena del año 2001 y la inserción de los Napo Runa en el proceso de transformación regional.

Para evitar la identificación de las personas a las cuales se refiere, lo cual sería posible a quienes conocen su relación con determinadas familias, el autor utiliza seudónimos para lugares y personas. Este procedimiento, en sí legítimo, deja en mi opinión de serlo al indicar el autor que redujo a un mínimo toda información negativa o que pudiera dar lugar a controversias (nota a pie de página 2, p. 171). Si bien Uzendoski nos asegura que tematizó ambos aspectos (positivos y negativos) de la sociabilización de los Napo Runa, no se refiere a conflictos de ningún tipo, excepto en un breve párrafo, hacia el final del libro, en el que menciona situaciones conflictivas entre esposos y entre las respectivas familias (104).

El tenor general del libro transmite una paz y armonía que es difícil de hallar en ninguna sociedad humana – y, como sabemos por otras obras sobre los Napo Runa, tampoco en este caso – y que se hubiera mostrado también en este libro, si el autor no hubiera evitado el tema. La pregunta hasta dónde su admiración y valoración positiva de los Napo Runa no lo ha llevado a idealizarlos, es legítima.

La autora de esta reseña reconoce su imposibilidad de seguir de a trechos la lógica de la argumentación de Uzendoski, por ejemplo en lo referente a dos fenómenos fundamentales de las sociedades amazónicas: las transformaciones, tan habituales en las tradiciones orales, de seres en animales y a la inversa y la función de los shamanes.

Partiendo del concepto de seres cuya forma y aspecto son oscilantes y cambiantes (*shape shifter*), por el cual una criatura puede cambiar a voluntad su aspecto y eludir así una identidad fija, el autor toma como ejemplo una canción cantada por una mujer, quien, abandonada por su esposo, se convierte en una paloma para seguirlo. Este tira un balazo al ave, que sin embargo logra escapar (57). La asimilación de mujeres y aves es habitual en relatos y canciones de numerosas sociedades amazónicas, y ha sido analizada en diferentes publicaciones.

Uzendoski se distancia de la comprensión tradicional de la categoría de “shamán” (*yachac*: Runa quichua), ya que éste no alcanza, en su opinión, a aprehender el modo en que los Napo Runa conceptualizan el shamanismo

como una estética de poder y transformación corpórea. Más adelante se lee con sorpresa que el autor asocia el shamanismo con los cambios de forma, por lo cual define como shamán a la mujer de la cual escuchó el canto. Adhiere al principio que el hecho que una persona se identifique a sí misma como shamán o no tiene importancia (alejándose así de toda interpretación émica). Y, sin embargo, seguramente la mujer que cantó la canción compartiría la sorpresa del lector, al verse colocada en la categoría de *yachaj* (por lo demás, una función exclusivamente masculina)! Pero esto no es todo: Uzendoski incluye en su definición de shamanismo a músicos, contadores de chistes, y evangélicos – ya que todos ellos participan en la mecánica transformadora.

Desde hace un par de décadas, se reconoce que transformación y metamorfosis, ya sea de humanos en animales o a la inversa, y también en otras criaturas, son un principio básico constituyente de las tradiciones orales de las tierras bajas sudamericanas, dado que los autores anglosajones no consideran necesaria la recepción de obras publicadas en alemán, hay que resignarse a que Uzendoski no pueda haber leído un trabajo aclarador de estos principios (M. Münzel, “Von der Rassel zum Ameisenbär – Was steckt hinter der Erscheinungsflucht?” *Münchener Beiträge zur Völkerkunde* 5.1998: 99–112). Menos explicable es que no exista una recepción del tratamiento (en inglés) de las transformaciones en las tradiciones orales y las religiones de las tierras bajas que hace Sullivan (“Incanchu’s Drum.” New York 1988: 239s.) ... aunque más no fuera para refutarlo.

En los últimos años algunos autores utilizan definiciones amplias del shamanismo: así, existen en la actualidad shamanes en regiones donde nunca los hubo (incluidas las sociedades europeas y norteamericanas), pero en estos casos se trata, al menos, de personas que ejercen formas de la terapia. Que en esta obra se defina como shamanes a los contadores de chistes, los músicos, los evangélicos, y una señora que canta una canción en la que tematiza el abandono conyugal supera la capacidad de aceptación de esta comentarista.

María Susana Cipolletti

Webb, Steve: *The First Boat People*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. 318 pp. ISBN 978-0-521-85656-0. (Cambridge Studies in Biological and Evolutionary Anthropology, 47) Price: £ 70.00

This book attempts to present an account of the initial colonization of Australia by seafarers, but one that is marred by significant shortcomings. Webb’s expertise is in the palaeopathology of Aborigines, and the only parts of his book that are of any value are his extensive forays into the Pleistocene human remains of Australia. In all other topics addressed in this volume, Webb is out of his depth. For instance, he presents a lengthy discussion of Pleistocene demographics, which is bereft of any real data or substance. We have absolutely no sound evidence even of geographical occupation patterns at any point in time, let alone are we in a position of estimating the number of people occupying any region of the world.

We do not even know the size of the world's population one or two millennia ago (estimates range from 140 to 500 million at the advent of the Christian era). Similarly, the author's musings on the extinction of Australian megafauna are of little consequence when he cannot offer any substantive evidence of the time humans appeared on the scene. Webb is quite undecided about the timing of that event, toying with the proposition of an Australian occupation by humans significantly earlier than 100 ka, even before 300 ka (95).

But his most consequential limitations are in the area of early seafaring, a principal topic of this book. Webb fails to cite the available academic or nonacademic literature, and seems to be genuinely ignorant of all of it. Verhoeven, who pioneered archaeological research in Flores and discovered the tools of *Homo erectus* there, is simply not listed in the bibliography, despite his excellent series of articles of the 1950s and 1960s – in this very journal in fact. Nor is Sondaar's crucial article of 1994 in *Comptes Rendus* cited, where he and his colleagues not only determined the age of the early Flores tools, but also stated unambiguously that they proved the presence of *H. erectus*. Webb does not find it necessary to mention this, but in view of the countless other inadequacies of this book it is more likely he was unaware of it, and of all other work he ignores. He even gets the dating issue of the Weaiwe sites wrong: Sondaar's palaeomagnetic results have precedence over Morwood's subsequent fission track dates, and the fossiliferous stratum occurs 1.5 m above the reversal, not below it (being, thus, of the very early Middle Pleistocene, and not of "the end of the Lower Pleistocene," p. 33). Webb's lack of rigour on dates is evident repeatedly, for instance, he places the Narmada calvarium at 400–500 ky on p. 17, but a few pages on, in Table 1.3, it is correctly said to be 200 ky. Which renders his comments on p. 17 even more absurd, where he states that this find shows that by 400–500 ky, people "had obviously pushed into the southern parts of India." He seems to think that only human remains can show the presence of humans at a given time. The Oldowan industries of India are far more relevant, but Webb seems unaware of them, as well as of the important second Narmada hominin, a pygmy.

On the questions of initial colonizations Webb's ideas turn out to be downright eccentric. He visualizes a "single chain" of 37 bands totalling 1110 people expanding from Sinai to the Bay of Bengal, 5500 km away. He tells us each band occupied an area of 471.2 km². Having thus reached the Bay of Bengal, this pan-Asian relay race broke into two beelines, one of 61 bands and leading to Lantian in China, the other ending at Modjokerto in Java and comprising another 33 bands. Therefore "this small number of people [2820, he tells us] would stretch back over 10,000 km to Sinai" (20). To appreciate the full absurdity of this palaeodemographic notion we need to follow Webb's convoluted musings about how the front end of this thin line of colonizers would have been replenished with adequate numbers of

fertile females (smoke signals, perhaps?) and similar logistic riddles. Then, 39 pages later, Webb abruptly rejects his own model, stating that "it is difficult to believe that people would have organised themselves" in such a chain (59).

This reviewer thinks it is difficult to believe a great deal of what is presented in this book. It descends into academic farce right from the beginning, with the first half dominated by this kind of statistical twaddle about population movements and densities, complemented by inane maps of illusory migration patterns and routes. The only value this discussion of nonexistent evidence has is as a heuristic demonstration of the weakness of all theories of Pleistocene mass migrations. What Webb and many other archaeologists and palaeoanthropologists fail to grasp is that the geographical distribution of hominin remains tells us very little about the distribution of the populations then living, and absolutely nothing about their movements, population densities, and demographics. The world map of hominin remains is simply a map of places where these remains could be preserved because of the most favourable sedimentary environments, and where they were searched for and were found. No such remains were found, for example, in acidic soils; does that mean hominins avoided such regions? Obviously, this is a matter determined by taphonomy, not a matter related to palaeodemography. And Webb's invaders standing massed at Sinai had no idea which way Modjokerto was, or that it was their destination. His whole notion of first colonizations is preposterous. He does not even know with certainty whether *H. erectus* arose first in Africa or Asia, as he cheerfully admits, in view of the finds from Renzidong and Nihewan. Webb himself notes: "I am as guilty as any of swinging back and forward over vast amounts of time in comparing erectines from one geographical region to another and so on; perhaps comparing oranges with apples. The thing is they are still fruit. . . . Archaeologists and palaeoanthropologists are often victims of their data and are sometimes forced to put together a story which, because of the constant introduction of fresh evidence, is often out of date almost before it is published (particularly in book form). At times, the researcher feels that what is about to be published will be superseded in a few months – if not before" (38).

In the case of Webb's own book, however, it was superseded several years before he wrote it, for which no excuse is acceptable. There is a wealth of published scientific information available on the subject of Pleistocene seafaring in various parts of the world. He is amazed that *H. erectus* reached Flores, but does not know that remains of that species have been found at another island, and relevant stone tools on two other islands not connected to another landmass. He thinks hominins may have crossed on a land bridge from Africa to Gibraltar (9), which is absurd as well as unnecessary: crossing Gibraltar Strait would have been much easier than the several demonstrated crossings in Wallacea. Webb's sea crossing scenarios are naïve; for instance, he fails to take into account the effects of plate tec-

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) Price: € 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