

tas; y la regla de localidad. La imagen final del capítulo es un sistema de parentesco y afinidad que, combinado con la norma de residencia uxori-local, define a las comunidades wichí como ámbitos socioculturales en donde la “buena voluntad” es la clave de todas las interacciones.

El capítulo 5 examina la guerra como el último de los recursos empleados para defender la “buena voluntad” de su contrario: la “delincuencia” (*amukweyaj*) afinal. Ante el abuso verbal o físico, el adulterio o el robo impune, el damnificado siente “enojo” (*waq*) y reclamará que se le “pague el valor” (*wohayě*). Si el agresor no lo hace, se produce una situación de violencia social. En todo caso, el “enojo” no es “agresividad” (*fwitseyaj*) y, por lo tanto, la guerra no atenta contra la “buena voluntad” sino que la reafirma.

Así se llega al sexto y último capítulo, donde el concepto de “buena voluntad” wichí es abordado de lleno. Palmer presenta los cuatro atributos que la caracterizan. La “voluntad individual” es el órgano metafísico del cuerpo que le confiere su carácter consciente, comunicativo y motivado; es un ser espiritual que se aloja en el corazón. La “voluntad social” (o “buena voluntad”) es producto de la socialización, que tiene como finalidad “eliminar la agresividad” mediante una educación no autoritaria del niño. Ella “transforma a los individuos biológicos en seres morales con capacidad social”. En algunos pocos casos el individuo desarrollará una voluntad especial, la “voluntad chamánica”, poseedora de “fuerza de voluntad” (*qapfwayaj*) que “es el poder mágico que tiene la voluntad... para lograr los objetivos que exceden la competencia de una operación física”. La similitud de este concepto con el de *mana* es tema de una crítica rigurosa. Con la muerte, la voluntad adquiere un nuevo estado y se transforma en el “alma del difunto” (*ahāt*).

En varias oportunidades Palmer deja sentado que su propuesta de traducir el término *husék* como “voluntad” y no como “alma” no pretende negar este último sino evitar utilizar un concepto desacreditado en el pensamiento occidental y, en última instancia, “reformularlo y revitalizarlo”. Por este motivo, en el anexo 2, revisa el tratamiento que el concepto de “alma” ha tenido en la literatura antropológica clásica (particularmente Tylor y Durkheim) y uno de sus antecedentes en la filosofía moderna (Schopenhauer). La crítica es sagaz y, a nuestro entender, junto con la comparación de *qapfwayaj* con *mana*, constituye el punto más teórico sugestivo del libro.

Completan la obra, una selección de literatura oral wichí en versión bilingüe (wichí y español) (anexo 3), varios dibujos y fotografías, una nota sobre la ortografía wichí (anexo 1) y el repertorio de topónimos analizados (anexo 4).

El libro “cumple un rol implícitamente político [dice Palmer en la “Introducción”], porque tiene por objeto aplicar la antropología a la defensa y promoción de los derechos humanos [del pueblo Wichí]”; y se los ofrece como un “tributo”. Por su claridad, consistencia y substancial originalidad es también un tributo para la antropología del Chaco.

Rodrigo M. Montani

Pawlik, Jacek Jan: Zaradzić nieszczęściu. Rytuły kryzysowe u ludu Basari z Togo. [To Overcome Misfortune. Crisis Rituals of the Bassari People of Togo.] Olsztyn: Studio Poligrafii Komputerowej “SQL” s. c., 2006. 301 pp. ISBN 978-83-88125-45-4. (Biblioteka Wydziału Teologii UWM, 31)

The author tackles a very difficult but one of the most crucial problems in Africa – people’s understanding of misfortune and ways of dealing with it. The Bassari of northern Togo are taken as the case study. Pointing out that the Bassari do not have a general and abstract notion of illness, the author presents ways in which painful experiences can be perceived and qualified as misfortune. He emphasizes that not all painful experiences are qualified as such. Only health problems (the author stresses that for the Bassari these include physical, psychological, and social dimensions) that cannot be solved by physical (pharmacological) means are taken into account but not automatically. There exists an entire process of searching for causes of problems, naming them, and eventually addressing them practically. The author pays a lot of attention to the latter aspect, namely practical response to misfortune. He demonstrates that it is done in rituals, particularly in crisis rituals. This leads him also to analyze the perception of rituals, their meaning and effectiveness. He concludes that ritual is a multidimensional phenomenon in its own right, thus irreducible to only one or a few of its aspects. Examining significance of ritual therapies the author tries to assess the effectiveness of performed rituals and shows that effectiveness is linked to religious beliefs. Significance of rituals is placed in the performance of the ritual act, while cathartic effects seem to be its by-product. Ritual is effective when it brings fully into being all that is experienced by the participants. For the Bassari with their very pragmatic approach to life effectiveness of ritual determines its veracity.

This book is the effect of the author’s meticulous field research conducted during his several years long stay in Togo among the Bassari, supplemented with additional intensive periods of research in later years. The author already showed his high anthropological competence in his previous book on the concept of death (*Expérience sociale de la mort*. Fribourg 1990). His intensive studies were augmented by systematic reviewing of publications on anthropology and Africa for *Anthropos*. The present book formed a part of the merit on which the author gained his habilitation in anthropology in 2007. It significantly strengthened the author’s position as one of the leading Africanists in Poland.

The book consists of seven chapters, introduction, conclusion, bibliography, 52 colour illustrations depicting various stages of performed rituals, a short Bassari-Polish dictionary of terms used in the book, three indices (thematic, geographical names, general and personal names) and resumes in English and French.

The first chapter sets the context in which the Bassari live. Four chapters (3–6) on rituals, containing material from field research, are enclosed by two theoretical chapters (2 and 7). The author masterly builds his theoretical framework for the purpose of his study drawing from the

vast anthropological theoretical literature on the subject of misfortune and ritual studies. In chapter 2 the author describes the passage from an empirically stated anomaly or pathology to the stage of considering it as a form of misfortune. While health is an element of the total harmony in which human beings live in the universe, illness is a form of chaos that disrupts the harmony. Thus, for the Bassari (and other peoples) the issue of illness includes another dimension perceived in the West as “religious/spiritual.” Western readers are reminded that a system of symbolic notions plays a significant role here. For the Bassari illness has also a social dimension. Finally, the author tackles the problem of linking misfortune with evil, reminding the reader about differences in African and Western perception of the problem. For the Bassari the moral dilemma is not considered as a choice between good and evil but between life and death! They treat all that destroys life as evil, at the same time trying to find out to what extent a person attacked by evil is responsible for bringing it about.

Cultural context plays a significant role in defining how people perceive and explain misfortune. The book shows multidimensionality of the problem presenting misfortune understood as an effect of an unpaid debt (chapter 3), as a result of taboo transgression (chapter 4), as a sign of choice (chapter 5), and misfortune due to aggression (chapter 6). In all of these chapters the author presents a detailed description of rituals performed in order to cope with misfortune, or to alleviate its effects. Needless to say the author observed all of them personally, giving the reader firsthand material. In chapter 7 the author tries to capture the most elusive aspect of the whole problem, writing at first about pragmatism and meaning of rituals. He, then, shows ritual as a process and draws the reader’s attention to rituals’ virtuality that allows for preserving the structures of ritual while offering possibilities for creativity in forms. Finally, the multidimensionality of ritual practice is stressed.

The theoretical chapters are very informative. However, this strength of the book turns at times into its weakness when the reader starts wondering about the purpose of referring to so many authors and about the way all these references are going to be applied to the material from Togo. It has to be stressed that the application is eventually done, and done very well. Still, the impression remains – particularly in chapter 7 – that the author tries to catch too many birds at once.

The challenge posed by the topic was augmented by differences in worldview between many Africans and Westerners. Throughout the book the author is aware that a fair treatment of the topic can only be guaranteed with paying full attention to these differences and alerting the reader to them. He successfully achieves that goal.

Generally, the book deserves a high praise and it should be of interest not only to anthropologists/Africanists because of its extensive and informative presentation of the original material from the fieldwork among the Bassari but also to all those who focus on ritual studies, philosophers, and theologians who concentrate on the problem of misfortune/evil.

Stanisław Grodź

Pinxten, Rik, and Ellen Preckler (eds.): *Racism in Metropolitan Areas*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2006. 190 pp. ISBN 978-1-84545-089-2. (Culture and Politics / Politics and Culture, 3) Price: \$ 22.50

This collection of essays is third in a series of publications on the relationship of culture and politics. It is based on papers presented at a conference on cities and racism, held in Brussels (the introduction neglects to mention when) and sponsored by the Evens Foundation. The conference’s – and this book’s – goal was to further the dialogue between scholars, policymakers, businesspeople, and people from the media and art worlds. The collaboration of science and political practice is also illustrated by the persons of the two editors: Pinxten is a professor of anthropology at Ghent University, Seckler is referred to as a “junior interface officer,” working as a liaison between the city of Ghent and youth movements.

Let me begin by stating that providing a framework for the collaboration between social scientists and policymakers is evidently a noble effort and potentially very important – if it really has a chance of making a difference in the world of policy, is a different matter and beyond the scope of this review – as is the exchange between social-scientific theory and political practice in general, and as are the issues of racism in contemporary societies and the social role of metropolitan areas in this and many other respects. For these reasons alone, the book deserves praise simply for the fact that it has been written. Regrettably, however, this seems to be already the best thing that can be said about it.

But let us first come back to the description of the book’s structure. After two brief pages of introduction, the volume is organized in two parts: the first, called “Disempowering through Racism,” presents nine essays that focus on the description and analysis of racism; the second, “Empowering to Combat Racism,” presents nine more essays that aim to describe strategies to improve racial relations, counter racism, and empower disadvantaged social groups. While those two foci are indeed roughly reflected in the respective sections’ articles, the internal selection of papers appears to be completely at random. The intended dialogue between theory and policy evidently falls short of any expectation for the simple reason alone that only one third of the essays is by others than social scientists. Even the “scientific” papers, some written by well-known anthropologists and many raising interesting points, are mostly just the length of conference presentations and for this reason preclude a sophisticated engagement with the issues at stake.

This leads to the main problem of this book: as conference volumes go, the papers are necessarily diverse, but in this case, it is impossible to discover any common thread or systematic framework that tries to bind these diverse contributions together in some way. Both racism and the study of metropolitan areas – the latter theme is actually hardly theorized at all in the book (claims in the introduction notwithstanding that it is supposed to be one of the book’s foci), which leaves the reader wondering if this is a selection of case studies that just happen to be addressing urban contexts, or if there is something particu-