

ical life [that] stresses collaborative and consensual deliberation and thoughtful, measured speech” and the dam consortium and government agents’ image of them as “the ignorant party responsible for persistently derailing negotiations” (247).

The author here completes her systematic establishment of “diplomacy” as a characteristic form of collective action which can be directed “cosmically” or between clans (sociologically). This strategy allows her to discuss kinship, cosmology (which here encompasses economy and, to an extent, kinship), and relations with enemies/the state/White people, in a conceptually unified way, yet without appearing to be reductive. It shows how the concept of diplomacy can be used to frame indigenous struggles over rights and resources in a way which respects indigenous cosmological perspectives.

Some readers will be disappointed that, despite the immensely rich ethnographic detail, Nahum-Claudel goes to no great lengths to introduce and develop individual characters in her story, and leaves little room for idiosyncratic divergences from the norm, petty disputes and their resolution, dissent and tension, or the unevenness and contradiction that usually pertains to cultural knowledge. But the approach she has chosen appears faithful to her subjects’ own way of thinking, and reinforces the sense of the eminently collective nature of Enawenê life.

Marc Brightman

Pavanello, Mariano: La papaye empoisonnée. Essais sur la société Akan des Nzema. Saarbrücken: Éditions universitaires européennes, 2017. 217 pp. ISBN 978-3-639-62278-2. Prix: € 41,90

Mariano Pavanello published this book a few years after concluding a research effort in the field of rare intensity, conducted from 1989 to 2013 in Nzema, an area inhabited by one of the Akan groups. The Nzema region, located close to the Atlantic coast, is divided into two sections by the border between Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire or Ivory Coast. Mariano Pavanello’s work, periodically joined by other scholars and supported by a team of assistants and students, had started from the imposing ethnographic and interpretive base produced by the “Italian Ethnological Mission in Ghana” (MEIG) of Rome University, directed between 1954 and 1977 by Vinigi L. Grottanelli, a leading figure in Italian anthropology and a well-known name in the international context of African studies. In this sense, “La papaye empoisonnée” offers not only an ex-post reconsideration that traces problematic issues Pavanello faced during twenty-five years of systematic research, but – implicitly and sometimes by his explicit choice – that also enables the reader to make a critical reassessment of the modes and outcomes of a study experience that went back six decades with regard to the present time of the book. An experience, we might add, that saw a good number of researchers – qualified as such by their inclusion in a

scientific “mission” – to reside with peculiar regularity and continuity in the really small communities of a circumscribed area, generating dynamics of a relationship whose effects on research work are often evident and a topic in itself of anthropological analysis.

In light of these considerations, what results as more than opportune is the attention that, in his introduction to the book, Pavanello devotes to justifying his role as an observer, coping with the now classic question of the ethnologist’s “positioning” – Mariano Pavanello strongly argues in favor of the term ethnology to define his own perspective of anthropological work – on the basis of a dense comparison with theoretical literature, moving from the conviction that what makes ethnology a science is the fact that it is at the same time historical and rhetorical. Historical practice in producing critical knowledge about man, as likewise the ethnological encounter is historically determined, while “ethnographic writing is the rhetorical implementation of a historically determined memory” (31).

A spasmodic cure for building ethnographic authority re-emerges several times through the volume’s seven successive chapters, constructed by adapting, updating, and remodeling essays that Pavanello already published from 1995 onwards in books, miscellanies, and journals, and in different languages: Italian (3 essays), French (3), and English (2).

The essays were chosen precisely to draw a picture that is certainly not exhaustive but sufficient to outline what Pavanello perceives as the Nzema “discourse” – past and present – by highlighting background categories through an analysis of some of the local notions that contribute to composing the basis on which social communication is organized and which traverse the categories of knowledge transmission. Pavanello lists these notions, which form the narrative texture of the volume’s different chapters: *ayene* (witchcraft, sorcerer), *ayidane* (poison, witchcraft), *amonle* (vow, malediction, oath), *abusua* (clan, lineage, family), *edweke* (word, event, case, story, narration, little quarrel), *pepelile* (justice), *adwenle* (knowledge), *nrelebe* (wisdom), *nshale* (truth), *amaamuo* (custom, tradition), *nvasoe* (profit), *suanu agyale* (lit. “marriage within the house,” to signify unions both between cross cousins and a free man and a slave or captive) (33).

The first chapter, which gives the title to the volume (The Poisoned Papaya), is built around a tortured case of “witchcraft” in which Pavanello describes himself as among the parties involved, with a marked – almost excessive – emphasis on his “internal outlook” in ethnographic observation. Through his philologically attentive and convincing analysis of the interaction between *ayene*, *ayidane*, *amonle* (for simplicity: witchcraft, poison, malediction) he argues how each of the three categories, although conceptually autonomous, fails to acquire meaning unless read in combination with at least one of the other two, and concludes that the position of those who consider sorcery and black magic as completely autonomous concepts is to be rejected, as is the

idea of lumping them in the single category of witchcraft. The second chapter deals with a case of judicial arbitration, associating an interaction of the concepts of justice, wisdom, truth, and others with the notion of custom (*amaamuo*), namely, the theoretical order of discourse and knowledge, and thus highlighting the process through which the act of judging transforms commonplace presuppositions into institutionally explicit and expressible theoretical thought (79). The third chapter deals with the complex, ambiguous relationship between knowledge, truth, narration, and reality, in relation to the local conception of history as expressed dynamically by oral tradition. Independent from what we might call historical reality, “narration is always true insofar as it respects the rhetorical canon and fulfills its proper function, namely that of portraying the knowledge and the will of ancestors” (95). Knowledge and truth remain at the center of the fourth chapter, in which, starting from a discussion of the interpretive perspectives of the philosophers Kwame Gyekye and Kwasi Wiredu, Pavanello resumes discussing the notion of *amaamuo* (custom) as ancestral legacy, trying to demonstrate its nature as systemic knowledge, overarched by an internal order, and ends up hypothesizing that this system of thought is exquisitely theoretical, “not in the sense of theory as a plausible organization of hypotheses on the world or as a formulation of general principles, but as rhetorical organization and at the same time a logic of metaphorical utterances” (111). The relationship between economic structure and social representation is at the center of the fifth chapter, where Pavanello emphasizes an identification between profit maximization and continuity of lineages, and their control over land and other resources, made by Nzema theory, which thus shows its nature as a moral theory of utility and power. The sixth chapter deconstructs the conventional interpretation in studies of the Akan notion of family (*abusua*) as inclusive of two distinct levels, corresponding to hierarchically ordered anthropological notions of clan, which includes a lineage series, with the addition, in the specific case, of an emphasis on matrilineality typical of the Akan area, to the point of making it an almost exclusive trait of *abusua*. By contrast, in the Nzema case Pavanello makes a much more complex interpretation. At any given moment, membership in *abusua* is thus made up as much of lines of maternal as paternal descent. After all, the *abusua* category expresses a hierarchical reality defined by history and especially by the legacy of slavery, or by the absorption of former slaves that gives rise to internal lines of paternal descent considerably marked by their unfree origins. The two anthropological notions of clan and lineage are thus not considered as different aspects of social reality but merely as two ways of representing it. The seventh and last chapter, which reaffirms and reinforces this, resumes a previous contribution by Pavanello to the debate that has been going on for some time within Akan studies in a critical response to Ivor Wilks’ thesis of the origin of matrilineality as a functional institution in the

phase that Wilks defined as the “big bang” of Akan’s history in the 15th–16th century, describing it as a very rapid transition from a hunting and gathering economy pursued by nomadic bands to an agrarian system founded on matrilineality and matrilineality as a structure of social organization. Based on a detailed analysis of the Nzema kinship system in a comparative picture with other Akan groups and thence by formulating an interesting interpretation of the Nzema institution of “marriage inside the house” (*suanu agyale*), Pavanello argues in favor of the idea that matrilineality, in combination with elementary kinship systems structured in groups of descent, was present in this region well before the 15th–16th-century transformations.

Considered in its overall construction as a monograph, “La papaye empoisonnée” is primarily a serried dialogue between Pavanello and his discipline. This is undoubtedly a demanding reading for the non-anthropologist reader, let alone the non-specialist of Akan Studies. On the other hand, by virtue of its thematic vastness and underlying analytical and interpretive sagacity, this book is without doubt challenging for those who move in the extraordinarily developed context of research on this part of West Africa.

In this regard, it is worth emphasizing the importance of Mariano Pavanello’s choice of gathering in a volume written explicitly for Francophone scholars a series of meditations on a society split between an English-speaking and a French-speaking country which, however circumscribed, has been and remains a matter of study for a comparatively high number of researchers, which, however, depending on which side of the border they stand on, even today tend too often to underestimate publications in each other’s language. In addition, there is the peculiar complication of a substantial body of research carried out over an exceptionally long period by Italian scholars who, at least until very recently, have contributed to this intense work by publishing in their own language. In this sense, Mariano Pavanello’s volume is a more than timely attempt to cast a communicative “bridge” between scholarly communities.

Pierluigi Valsecchi

Peleggi, Maurizio: *Monastery, Monument, Museum. Sites and Artifacts of Thai Cultural Memory*. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2017. 266 pp. ISBN 978-0-8248-6606-8. Price: \$ 62.00

Maurizio Peleggi’s “*Monastery, Monument, Museum. Sites and Artifacts of Thai Cultural Memory*” is a welcome contribution to studies of cultural memory, Thai Studies, Buddhist Studies, and the history of art. In addition, its final chapter should be of benefit to artists and curators who may still engage too little with work produced from and about spaces in some way related to Thailand. In “*Monastery, Monument, Museum*” Peleggi seeks to show, through a *longue durée* study running from the 13th century A. D. to the early 21st century, the processes through which the “mnemonic landscape”