

There is an embarrassing tension running through Reid's book between her aspiration to appear to be uniquely conversant with local Mi'kmaq on their own terms and her aspiration to engage in lofty discourse with the most sophisticated and inaccessible of Western philosophers. Among the many impressive names dropped in these few pages are Luther, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Eliade, Lévi-Strauss, Derrida, and Bhabha. However, Reid's deliberations on postmodernity, postcolonialism, and deconstruction (particularly chap. 4) have no recognizable connection to the empirical sections on Mi'kmaq folklore, legal cases, and the Saint Anne's Day Mission. Nor does she seem intellectually equipped to (critically) assess the contributions of Walter Mignolo, Homi Bhabha, or Jacques Derrida, whose central concept of *différance* is, incidentally, misspelled (73). Her conversations with Mark Taylor, Robert Bellah, and other theorists similarly indicate that her analytical aspirations far transcend her caliber.

Nobody who has spent any time among Mi'kmaq can avoid registering their multiple and very valid reasons for resenting centuries of marginalization. The conclusion that Kluskap in the late 19th century embodied such resentment, as well as a Messianistic prophecy of redemption, has been obvious to folklorists and anthropologists for more than a century. To present such reflections in 2013 as the privileged understanding of one who has finally made the requisite journey to find Kluskap is simply irritating.

Anne-Christine Hornborg

**Roberts, Allen F.:** *A Dance of Assassins. Performing Early Colonial Hegemony in the Congo.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013. 311 pp. ISBN 978-0-253-00743-8. Price: \$ 25.99

"This is a book about a beheading." So begins "A Dance of Assassins," a historical ethnography in which Allen Roberts examines the shifting social and political contexts of the early colonial period in what became the Democratic Republic of Congo. Roberts focuses on an ultimately transformational encounter between Émile Storms, a Belgian explorer, and Lusinga, an ambitious local chief with a settlement near the village of Lubanda on the western bank of Lake Tanganyika. By doing an extensive microanalysis of a single event in the early years of the colonial encounter, Roberts highlights the negotiations and struggles for power that defined everyday life in the late 19th century (with European dominance in no way predetermined). He also privileges a "contrapuntal perspective" (6) in which there are competing narratives of Africans and Europeans, and individuals within and across these larger groupings. Roberts, trained as a sociocultural anthropologist, draws on several years of ethnographic research conducted in the 1970s in Lubanda, however, most of his material comes from archival sources and museum holdings analyzed over the course of forty years of research.

Chapter 1 lays out the historical context both in Belgium and Lubanda, and the events, politics, aspirations, and trajectories that lead to the conflict between Storms

and Lusinga. Chapter 2 explores conflicting narratives of Lusinga's beheading and the circumstances surrounding the event, using oral histories of several elderly Congolese men in Lubanda, placed in conversation with Storms' diary. Here, Roberts examines the nuances and richness of Tabwa oral narratives called *milandu*, illuminating Tabwa-centered interpretations of Storms' presence, physical body, and his encounter with Lusinga. Chapter 3 focuses on "Histories Made by Bodies" by investigating dance and performance culture of the Tabwa, and how dance and song were used by Storms' local soldiers to trick Lusinga into letting his guard down. Again privileging Tabwa perspectives on performance, Roberts notes that the dance of the soldier was "magically and spiritually efficacious" (89), resulting in the triumph of Storms' soldiers over Lusinga and his forces. Chapter 4 focuses on Storms' attempts to transform Lubanda by constructing and trying to impose European ideas of time, value, place, and natural order (109). Through daily routine, organization, dress, and even the playing of European instruments, Storms also performed "European-ness" for the residents of Lubanda. Chapters 5 and 6 outlined many problematic choices that Storms made, from owning slaves, to being connected to the beheading of several chiefs, to contributing to racist pseudoscience that classified Africans as inferior.

Chapter 7 examines how Storms represented his colonial experience in his own home, with figurines, arrows, and other objects from Lubanda on display, including a wooden figure representing Lusinga's title and matrilineage. Chapter 8 focuses on Lusinga, pointing out that he was intentionally incorporating and using Luba practices and discourse (originating among peoples living further to the west), to justify and define his own conquests in Lubanda and surrounding areas. In a sense, he was performing being Luba, and thus redefining himself as such (175). After Lusinga was killed, another man was selected to take his place and was also called Lusinga. Storms reacted to this development with a violent campaign against the new Lusinga and Kansabala, another chief who he also saw as subversive. The result, however, was not what Storms expected – one or more of his adversaries burned his prized fortress to the ground, just two months before Storms left for Belgium. Chapter 9 investigates the funeral rites surrounding the death of a local chief who dies after Storms' departure in order to emphasize the importance of the skull of deceased chiefs in Tabwa political succession and the use of other bodily fluids and parts as activating agents in local medicines (204). This brings the reader back to the beheading of Lusinga because his skull, even today, is among others in a drawer at the Tervuren Museum in Belgium, sent there by Storms. The last chapter juxtaposes several material objects on display at the Tervuren Museum that are connected to this colonial encounter; a bust and a watercolor portrait of Émile Storms are interpreted with and against a sculpture of an armed African standing in a defiant pose and the wooden Lusinga figure that Storms had confiscated.

There are many strengths in Roberts' monograph. First, he focuses on the colonial encounter as a process,

rather than a predetermined set of events. This shows how European colonialism in Africa, and more specifically the Congo, was uneven, tenuous, and tentative, especially in the late 19th century. Second, he does his best to render the perspectives of Lusinga, Kansabala, and other local chiefs, capturing “hidden histories” and simultaneously situating them within wider worlds of meaning and power (John and Jean Comaroff 1992: 17). He does this primarily through the *milandu* that he records with several elderly men in Lubanda discussing the beheading of Lusinga. Such an approach allows readers to see, that specific African individuals (rather than an anonymous group) as well as particular Europeans influenced the unfolding of events and interactions in Lubanda. Moreover, Roberts illuminates Tabwa interpretations of events, which are informed by particular relationships between the living and supernatural realms and counterbalance European interpretations. Third, one of the ways that he seeks to recover hidden histories is through the use of performance. In chapter 3 especially, he draws on ethnographic and other sources to create an “archaeology of performance” to try and imagine the dance that Storms’ soldiers used to overtake Lusinga. Such an approach reveals the importance of performance and expressive culture in the everyday politics of Eastern Congo during this time period.

However, “A Dance of Assassins” can also be seen as having some weaknesses, like any other work. More recent ethnographic research and even more interviews with Tabwa-speaking people in Lubanda could have given more of a perspective on Tabwa interpretations of this encounter between Lusinga and Storms. For example, has the recent political violence in the eastern Congo region affected local people’s remembrances of the Storms-Lusinga encounter? Also, while Roberts does draw on his ethnographic knowledge and other recent accounts to try and fill some of the gaps in the written archive, occasionally the supporting evidence is scant and could easily be interpreted in other ways. The archaeology of performance was a great contribution, but Roberts could have gone even further in his analysis of performance in everyday life for both Lusinga (performing Lubaness) and Storms (performing Europeaness). Overall, however, the strengths of the book far outweigh the weaknesses.

In closing, “A Dance of Assassins” is an engaging, vigorously researched historical ethnography that uses a set of micro-level events and interactions to reveal the complexity and nuances of the early colonial encounter in what would become the Belgian Congo. This book would be of interest to upper-level undergraduates, graduate students, and scholars in African Area Studies, Anthropology, History, Museum Studies, and even Performance Studies. Yolanda Covington-Ward

**Roy, Babul:** *Zeme Naga. From Polytheism to Monotheism. An Anthropological Account of Religion Transformation.* New Delhi: Serials Publications, 2011. 373 pp. ISBN 978-81-8387-456-4. Price: \$ 50.00

This is an ethnographic and historical account of the Zeme, a Naga tribe, who live in the Northeastern Indian

states of Assam, Nagaland, and Manipur. Drawing primarily on a study done in North Cachar Hills of Assam from 1989–1995, it provides a substantive account of Zeme traditional culture and the different facets of historical and cultural change.

The book is divided into 7 chapters and is organised thematically. The book begins with a helpful introduction into the field and with the Zeme Nagas. It provides the reader with a sense of working in the North Cachar Hills amongst Zeme villages and the challenges faced by the ethnographer. From walking for whole days to meet informants, to being challenged by Naga nationalists with AK-47s demanding to know the identity of the researcher, there is this palpable sense of the “field” as a dynamic and powerful landscape that is imbued with the experiences of the people, their desires, and attitudes that shape both the researcher and the researched.

The main aim of the book, explains Roy, is to examine the socioreligious changes that have occurred amongst the Zeme in the last century by understanding two ideal positions: the “ethnographic past” and the “ethnographic present” (2). In order to accomplish this, Roy is interested in examining the total Zeme universe and how changes brought about by religious movements, such as the reforms initiated by the Heraka (a Zeme religious reform movement), to the recent spread of Christianity amongst the Zeme, are juxtaposed with the “traditional” Zeme who still follow their older practices. The broader aim of the book is, therefore, to look at the transformation of Zeme society through the aforementioned movements and to appreciate the historical context in which these unravelled.

For this to follow, Roy begins with the various historical writings on the Nagas drawn from accounts written by British administrators, travellers, and scholars. Much of this section is a retracing of already established scholarship in this area, with no particular new insight. In fact, it reads like an encyclopaedic entry that attempts to inform rather than provide in-depth historical analysis. The same can be said of chap. 2 – People, Society & Institutions – that provides a detailed account of Zeme history and social structure through a combination of historical material and also ethnographic accounts. This kind of encyclopaedic method is followed throughout the lengthy descriptions in chap. 3 (Ecology, Material Culture & Economy) and chap. 4 (Medicines & Cures). While there is very interesting folk knowledge concerning the local practices amongst the Zeme, there is little to tie these chapters to the main concern of the central argument presented by Roy. It is only from chap. 5 – The Supernatural World – that we get a sense of Roy’s thesis unfolding. Initially there is a considerable amount of description of traditional Zeme culture, particularly that of the different rituals practised, which could have been edited down to reflect its resonance with the main argument. Nevertheless, the discussion gets interesting when Roy examines the Heraka movement, particularly its history and its position within the larger geopolitical climate in northeast India. The Heraka movement is a socioreligious reform that has its genesis with a Rongmei Naga leader named Jadonang from around the late 1920s. His reforms were popular in