

für die Religionsethnologie, die feministische Theorie und nicht zuletzt die afrikanische Philosophie stellt das Werk mit seinen kenntnisreichen Betrachtungen und tiefsinnigen Überlegungen einen wertvollen Beitrag dar.

Friederike Schneider

**Reithofer, Hans:** *The Python Spirit and the Cross. Becoming Christian in a Highland Community of Papua New Guinea.* Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2006. 392 pp. ISBN 978-3-8258-9336-9. (Göttinger Studien zur Ethnologie, 16) Price: € 39.90

The Somaip people, living at the intersection of three major linguistic groups in the Papua New Guinea Highlands, were guardians of Tunda – the most important traditional ritual site in the Enga, Huli, Wola/Mendi cultural region. The Somaip had brief encounters with European explorers in the 1930s, but were exposed to Christian mission teaching only in the early 1960s. Unlike before where they were at the “centre” of a large ritual complex, today they are marginalised in a state of relative isolation.

The present enquiry is concerned with the indigenization of Christianity among the Somaip and how they have interpreted and appropriated a foreign religious form in terms of local conceptual schemes and thus made it their own. Reithofer, who spent two years living with the Somaip (1998–2000) with a follow-up visit in 2003, focuses on three themes: motives for conversion, the role of the Somaip as active participants in their own conversion (indigenisation), and the way they have constructed a new identity as owners of the sacred Tunda ritual site who are now Christian.

The author argues that the Somaip religion has not been erased in the process of Christianization. Despite substantial changes in the external expression, it provided the main hermeneutical key for the selective and creative appropriation of Christianity. Thus Somaip Christianity has been shaped as much by the conceptual schemes and values of the preexisting religion and cosmology as by the teaching of the missionaries. In the Somaip mind their new identity as Christians seems predicated on a radical opposition between their past traditions and the Christian present, yet from an etic perspective there is continuity between the two. Reithofer describes how the Somaip through “symbolic engineering” blend indigenous and biblical geographies, thus linking Christian history with their own. Thus they vindicate ancestral knowledge and practices which were central to their pre-Christian identity and at the same time take on Christian beliefs and rituals which for them are the new rituals of renewal of their universe. Tunda, their ultimate cult site is home not only to their founding ancestor, the Python Spirit, but also to Adam and Eve, Abraham, Moses, Mary, and Jesus Christ.

In order to show the reality of discontinuity in the Somaip mind, the author provides a detailed account (almost 200 pages) of pre-Christian beliefs and practices. His description of rituals for reproducing life, attracting wealth, combating illness, and renewal are a

valuable contribution to knowledge and understanding of traditional religion in the Highland. He also expands our awareness of how Ain’s Cult – which figures in a number of other studies from the region – impacted on the lives of the Somaip and prepared them for the Christian “prophets” who followed.

The second part of the book shifts from an anthropological perspective to a missiological one. Some readers may find the shift disconcerting as the writer changes from the role of impartial researcher to participant, since he was very much part of the changes that he discusses. Reithofer, acting as both priest and researcher, argues that ancestral knowledge and the millenarian Ain’s Cult facilitated the acceptance of Christian cosmology, rituals, and eschatology, and that in a process of mutual reinforcement, the latter helped validate ancestral beliefs, seen as bringing them to their fulfilment.

What is less clear and perhaps controversial is the extent that the presence of the writer impacted on the events he describes. In the lead-up to the year 2000, perceived in millenarian and cult-like perspective by many in Papua New Guinea, how was the writer’s presence instrumental in revealing God’s plans for the new millennium? One is reminded of Donald Tuzin’s discovery in “The Cassowary’s Revenge” (Chicago 1997), how he himself was a principal figure in prophesied return of the youngest brother from America.

This book is well-written and despite the reservations expressed above concerning the ambiguous role of the researcher, it is a book well-worth reading for anyone interested in religious developments in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea, and the wider issue of the dynamics of conversion and the ongoing process of becoming Christian.

Philip Gibbs

**Rihtman-Auguštin, Dunja:** *Ethnology, Myth, and Politics. Anthropologizing Croatian Ethnology.* Ed. by Jasna Čapo Žmegač. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004. 144 pp. ISBN 978-0-7546-4039-4. Price: £ 45.00

This little book presents a wonderful insight into Croatian ethnology and anthropology. Dunja Rihtman-Auguštin (1926–2002) was one of the key actors in it, and, in the last few decades of her life, she grew in prominence in what is probably one of the best regional ethnological/anthropological traditions.

There is some confusion between the terms “ethnology” and “anthropology,” of course, as these are not value-free concepts. In the former Yugoslavia, “anthropology” was primarily regarded as “a dangerous import from the West,” while “ethnology” was supposed to be a combination of sociology and folklore, primarily dedicated towards studying one’s own people (or “nation”). This resulted in some peculiarities, so that, for example, members of various ethnic groups studied only “their” people (Croats studied Croats, Serbs studied Serbs, Slovenians Slovenians, etc.). As generations of younger scholars became disenchanted with this ideological baggage, and as politics imposed itself in all of former Eastern Europe, but former Yugoslavia in

particular, Rihtman-Auguštin coined the term “ethno-anthropology” as a possible way out. On the one hand, she was always very conscious of the limitations of socialist-era education and attempts to completely ignore politics; but on the other (as demonstrated in some of the essays), the founding father of Croatian ethnology, Milovan Gavazzi, taught in late 1940s something that today would be regarded as “cultural anthropology.” The author was herself very prominent in the methodological and theoretical debates about directions and future of Croatian ethnology in the early 1990s. As a result, there is a whole new generation of brilliant scholars (almost all of them women) who have in the last decade produced some truly outstanding works.

The main body of the book consists of ten essays, written mostly in the last two decades, and already published in Croatia and Serbia in slightly different forms. Rihtman-Auguštin was taught by two men who determined the development of Croatian ethnology for over half of the century (Gavazzi and Bratanić), but gradually developed different and eclectic interests, ranging from Lévi-Strauss’s structuralism to Geertz’s interpretive theory. As a witness and participant in the fascinating field of Croatian ethnology, she was perfectly positioned to outline, with outstanding clarity and insight, both historical and theoretical developments of the discipline.

Although all the essays are brilliant exercises in historical sketches combined with Rihtman-Auguštin’s impressive knowledge, the one on the 19th-century Croatian ethnologist, Antun Radić, particularly stands out. Using Eugen Weber’s concept of “peasants into Frenchmen,” she demonstrates how similar methodology can be applied to her native country, with quite original results. Among the more theoretical ones, the final essay of the book (“The ICTY in The Hague and Anthropological Expertise”) questions our positions on reality, knowledge (both local and other), and expertise, putting it in a very specific and serious context of deliberations at the International War Crimes Tribunal. When questioning other (“nonnative”) interpretations of events, Rihtman-Auguštin was not going to fall into the “it takes one to know one” attitude – instead, she carefully outlined different perspectives and points of view. She was simply too good a scholar and too intelligent a person to demand her readers to simply agree with her – what Rihtman-Auguštin does is essentially to open the space for a dialogue on some very important issues.

The editor of this volume, Jasna Čapo Žmegač, also deserves the credit for this invitation for a debate. The book is nicely set out, but there are some unnecessary errors (for example, Gavazzi was born in 1895 – not 1885), and translation is sometimes awkward (the translators used the word “imposing” instead of “establishing,” for example). It would have been interesting to include some notes on the debates about “ethnology” and “anthropology” that characterized Croatia in the early 1990s – without them, some implications of Rihtman-Auguštin’s brilliance are not that obvious to

outside observers. Having said that, I believe that this is only a first step towards better understanding of one of the liveliest and most original anthropological traditions in contemporary Europe. Aleksandar Bošković

**Rödlach, Alexander:** *Witches, Westerners, and HIV. AIDS and Cultures of Blame in Africa.* Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2006. 247 pp. ISBN 978-1-59874-034-9. Price: \$ 29.95

Paul Farmer’s book: “AIDS and Accusation. Haiti and the Geography of Blame” from 1992 (Berkeley) brought the AIDS epidemic into the historical, economic, and political context in which it is unfolding. With Alexander Rödlach’s book we have finally got an African counterpart to this work. Politics of blame are no less relevant in relation to the African AIDS epidemic, and Rödlach sets out to explore these in Zimbabwe: From witchcraft accusations in everyday social interactions to conspiracy theories about national and international agents.

In the introduction Rödlach sets the theoretical frame of his discussion: The search for meaning in the face of misfortune, social representations theory (the dynamics of how meanings become attributed to the AIDS epidemic), and the applicability of studies on illness meaning and representation to AIDS interventions. He furthermore describes the setting and his fieldwork, which took place in a small town called Plumtree on the southwestern border of Zimbabwe and a township in Bulawayo, the second largest city of Zimbabwe. In chapter one he further elaborates the conditions of his fieldwork, the methods used, and in particular his double role as catholic priest and anthropologist. Chapter two is an overview of the historical and political context in which the Zimbabwean AIDS epidemic has unfolded: The history of the Ndebele kingdom, the arrival of European traders, missionaries, and administrators, the establishment of European rule, the national politics from 1960 onwards, the political struggle for majority rule, the political turmoil of recent years, and the economic decline it has caused. Finally the arrival of the AIDS epidemic, the declining health care system, and national responses to the epidemic are outlined. All of the above, it is argued, has shaped the experience of AIDS and contributed to the interpretation of the epidemic within a discourse of blame.

Part II consists of three chapters on different kinds of sorcery evoked in relation to AIDS. The author shows that they must all be understood within the context of illicit sex, and can be seen as a form of social control. Part III presents different kinds of conspiracy theories concerning the origin of AIDS, some of which involve international agents (especially the U.S.). Others are concerned with health care providers and Westerners more generally speaking. Much of this discussion is based, not only on interviews, but also on an analysis of debates in the media. In the final part of the book, one chapter compares sorcery accusations and conspiracy theories in order to further our understanding of theories