

für die Religionsethnologie, die feministische Theorie und nicht zuletzt die afrikanische Philosophie stellt das Werk mit seinen kenntnisreichen Betrachtungen und tiefssinnigen 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