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THE WANDER WOMEN: SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT GENDER IN AMAZONIA

FABIANA MAIZZA<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract.** Based on my ethnographic research with the Jarawara, speakers of an Arawá language inhabiting the middle course of the Purus River in Brazilian Amazonia, this article explores how a particular notion of the agency of Jarawara women may be linked to dream activity and shamanic knowledge. I examine the festival held when girls emerge from their seclusion at menarche, the *mariná* ‘ritual’ and its effects on the composition of a ‘takeable’ agent. The idea explored here is that ‘sleepiness’ (*nokobisa*), ‘tiredness’ (*mama*) and ‘beauty’ (*amosa*) are forms of *ritual action* that aim to develop (or better, draw out) the capacity of women’s bodies to be ‘takeable’ (*towakama*) or ‘carriable’ (*weyena*). This capacity is also associated with shamans. Through this exploration of the Jarawara ‘female initiation ritual’, I also question the public/domestic and man/woman dichotomies.

**Keywords:** agency, Amazonia, effects, gender, knowledge, indigenous women, initiation ritual

**Female agency**

During a recent stay in Casa Nova, the largest village of the Jarawara, an indigenous people living along the middle course of the Purus river in Amazonas state, a large one-day football competition was held to which many guests were invited. The prize for the winning team was a pig, raised from a young age especially for the occasion. After the tournament was over, dinner was offered in the evening to the participants, and at around 9 pm a *forró* dance began. The young hosts and their friends sang popular *arrocha* and *brega* hits accompanied by keyboards also played by themselves. The dance floor remained packed all night, and in the early hours the houses were still bustling with people constantly coming and going, drinking, chatting and wandering about for diverse reasons. It was without doubt a great festival in terms of the number of guests invited and their enjoyment – or at least that is how young people described it to me.

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<sup>1</sup> Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Paraná (Universidade Federal do Paraná, or UFPR), Brazil; Affiliated Researcher, Centre of Amerindian Studies (Cesta), University of São Paulo (USP); Post-doctoral Fellow, Centre Enseignement et Recherche en Ethnologie Amérindienne (Erea/Lesc), Paris. Address: Department of Anthropology, UFPR, 460 Rua General Carneiro (6<sup>th</sup> floor), cep: 80060-150, Curitiba, Paraná, Brazil; email: [fabianamaizza@ufpr.br](mailto:fabianamaizza@ufpr.br). I would like to thank the São Paulo State Research Support Foundation (FAPESP) for providing funding towards my postdoctoral research. I would also like to thank Makeni, Hinabori, Manira and Narabi, my friends who taught me so much. I also thank all the researchers present at the ‘Indigenous women in Lowland South America’ work group at the XI Mercosur Anthropology Meeting, especially for their comments on the material presented here. My thanks also go to Michael Houseman for his comments on a preliminary version of this text and David Rodgers for translating the original Portuguese text into English.

By around three in the morning I was already feeling very tired, but I stayed close to the dance floor, observing the young men and women dancing. I looked around and realized that virtually all the older women, both guests and hosts, were also sitting there, just like myself, watching the dance. Perhaps somewhat ethnocentrically, I thought that they were keeping themselves awake from a 'desire' to see the *forró* until the end, imagining that they could not miss this rare night of excitement, amid the so many quiet nights of their day-to-day lives. It was only the next day, while talking with some people about the night's events and the gossip from the festival, that I discovered the older women had stayed awake until dawn in order to 'look out' or 'care' (*kakatoma*) for their 'daughters', 'nieces' or 'granddaughters'. There were many non-indigenous men in the village, and the women (but also the men) were extremely worried that 'the Whites' (*yara*) could 'carry' (*weye*), 'hold' (*bokori*) or 'take' (*towaka*) the young Jarawara women to the outskirts of the village to have sexual relations with them, or worse still, that they might 'steal' (*boti*) the women to marry them. On this night of *forró*, some girls were indeed 'taken' to the forest, despite the earlier warnings from their close kin 'not to go with the men', warnings did not 'obey' (*tokataba*). My impression was that the watchful presence of an older woman ensures that these young women are not 'carried', as if the former 'held' (*tamana*) the latter with their gaze.

On the other hand, the hypothesis I wish to explore here is that these young women have a certain ability to be 'takeable' (*towakama*) or 'carriable' (*weyena*), hence the vigilance. This ability is revealed by the girls during the period after their first menstruation, when they remain in seclusion in huts made especially for them, the *wawasa*. This is the desired effect of the *mariná* emergence festival, an event that can be described as a 'female initiation ritual'. During these festivals, sleeping and dreaming become forms of learning and of recognizing the capacities of both the body and the soul. These are the central arguments that I seek to develop during the course of this article, where they merge with an attempt to translate the Jarawara terms *weye* and *towaka*. *Weye* means something like 'carry', 'place/take/carry on the shoulders', 'use (wear) something', while *towaka* refers to the acts of 'taking', 'being taken', 'taking with'. The vocabulary in which the festival is formulated mobilizes other terms that dialogue with these: the girl's father 'detains' (*nawata*) his daughter before 'releasing her' (*sobana*) at the moment of the festival. Marriage too is conceived as a kind of 'holding': 'if you want to marry,

you have to hold', I was told. Conjuality is like 'holding' (*tamana*) and never 'letting go' (*sobana*).

The argument developed here is that, in Jarawara society, female agency is linked to the terms *weye* and *towaka* and involves the fact that women personify or incorporate the qualities of 'being takeable' and of acquiring knowledge through dream journeys, the latter being effects produced by the *mariná*. From the viewpoint of a person from the western tradition, these qualities, which I call 'agency', could be seen as 'passive' or the antithesis of what the concept of 'agent' means to us (Mahmood 2001: 210-212). In the Amerindian world, however, 'dreaming' is an important form of learning (Kopenawa and Albert 2010). Another part of my argument is that the category of 'woman' should not be taken as an *a priori* based on the western premise that 'nature' is given and differentiates the sexes innately (Strathern 1980: 191), but that it should be understood instead through ethnographic narratives.

Much of what I present in this work is linked to my own experience of a *mariná* held in May 2014 for a young woman called Dyimamirira. Dyimamirira's mother and her sisters are the women who have been closest to me ever since my first visit to Casa Nova in 2004. When I arrived for her daughter's festival, Makeni told me to hang up my hammock inside her house, meaning I was just a few metres from the *wawasa*, Dyimamirira's seclusion hut. Because of this proximity, I experienced the *mariná* in a very particular way. The present text provides me, in effect, with the chance to reveal some of my own sense of 'dazzlement' (Strathern 1999: 258).

### **About women**

Before proceeding further, I wish to situate some of the ideas with which I shall be dialoguing indirectly in this work, perhaps the most important being how to approach concepts like 'woman' and 'female'. Today the non-universality of the category 'woman' seems to form part of western ideas in general.<sup>2</sup> In the 1970s, anthropology contributed to the critical reformulation of the category 'woman' by providing ethnographic examples of the variability of gender and gender roles, and reinforcing the feminist position that gender is not biologically determined (Moore 1994: 10). Authors like Sherry Ortner (1974) and Michelle Rosaldo (1974) furnished a social rather than a biological description of women's position in society and the origins of

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<sup>2</sup> In this article I use the term 'western' to refer to societies corresponding to what Bruno Latour calls 'modern' (1991), i.e. societies that believe themselves to be different from others because they 'dominate nature'.

gender difference (Moore 1994: 11). However, in the process of arguing against ‘biological determinism’ and in favour of ‘social constructionism’, feminist authors and anthropologists both left suspended the underlying idea that there exist innumerable social formulations for a supposedly single and self-evident fact: the natural distinction of the sexes that is given by male and female bodies. The feminist separation of sex and gender, rather than challenging the dominant western models, ended up reproducing the same premises on which these models are based (Yanagisako and Collier 1987: 25, 49), one being the public/domestic dichotomy.

In western society, family, home and the ‘domestic’ merge into a single unit, defined in opposition to the ‘public’ sphere of work, business and politics (Moore 1988: 23; Rapp 1979: 510). Commerce involves competitive relations, negotiations and contracts that western society sees as separate from and opposite to relations of intimacy, raising children and care associated with family and home (ibid.). The public sphere, the place of work, needs to be kept as separate as possible from the child-centredness of the home: to become an adult, the person must leave the domestic sphere (Strathern 1988: 89).

Anthropology initially conceived the household as a nuclear family composed of a father, a mother and the couple’s children, as Malinowski defined the family (Yanagisako 1979, cited in Moore 1988: 24). However, these ties were later minimized, and it was argued instead that the basic unit of society was not the family but the mother-children unit (Fortes and Goodenough, cited in Moore 1988: 23-4). In this formulation the very notion of ‘domestic’ is constructed through an interweaving of the concepts of ‘mother’ and ‘maternal care’ (Moore 1988: 25). The category ‘woman’ is directly associated with maternal attributes like fertility, naturalness, maternal love, care, feeding, giving life and reproduction (ibid.). In western society, the categories ‘woman’ and ‘mother’ overlap, meaning that the definition of ‘woman’ depends on the concept of ‘mother’ and the activities associated with ‘being a mother’ (ibid.). Hence one of the clear premises of the western concept of gender is its insistence that maternity is natural and paternity cultural: mothers make babies naturally and biologically (Haraway 1990). Paternity is a cultural variable, while maternity is more natural, more universal and more constant (Moore 1988: 24).

In ‘Euro-American’ (western) kinship, intimate relations are linked to procreation, while procreation is directly related to sexual intercourse, conception and birth (Strathern 1995: 303; Schneider 1968). Sexual intercourse reproduces parenthood as the result of a union of parties

who differ from each other by gender: a woman and a man have sexual relations in order to have a child. But while fathers and mothers are seen as equal in terms of their genetic contribution, their roles in the kinship process are different. Maternity is established by the mother giving birth, while paternity is produced through proof of sexual relations with the mother (Strathern 1995: 303). It is a cultural convention to imagine that the father can never truly 'know' whether a woman's child is also his own – this must always be proved (ibid.: 311).

While in the west the idea prevails that procreation should occur within the context of a relationship, the social partner is also imagined to be a biological partner (ibid.: 314). But since procreation is taken as a natural fact, we imbue woman with both the naturalness (givenness) of her role as a mother and the responsibility of providing a father for 'her' children through her relationship with the man with whom she has sexual relations. We also imbue women with the image of guardians of the ideal that biological procreation should be tied to a social relationship (ibid.: 314-15). We presume that relationships need to be created, constructed by human action on a natural, given world of individuals whose bodies determine their sexual difference (ibid.: 317). Our idea of procreation is thus perhaps the most powerful metaphor for the form in which we conceive gender relations.

One variant of this way of thinking is the argument that everywhere in the world, women are providers of sexual and domestic services, and as such possess an equal and intrinsic value, while men have the legitimate authority to exchange women (Yanagisako and Collier 1987: 5). During the 1950s and 1960s, many societies were described by anthropologists, both male and female, from the premise that men must control female fertility in the same way that they control nature, thus assuming that women substantialize fertility (Strathern 1988). Marilyn Strathern argues that this way of formulating the question of the dichotomy between feminine and masculine – that is, linking it to the oppositions domestic/public and natural/social, is based on the fact that we imagine that 'women make babies' (Strathern 1988: 311). In contrast to this formulation, the author shows that Melanesian women do not in fact make babies (ibid.). In his article 'What kinship is?', Marshall Sahlins describes ethnographic examples where we find, to cite the author, 'men who are mothers, women who are fathers: there is nothing inevitable about the kinship of procreation' (Sahlins 2011: 4). Along the same lines, Lee Drummond argues that maternity, far from being the most natural thing in the world, is one of the most anti-natural:

becoming pregnant, giving birth and caring for a child are dilemmas that require a high degree of cultural interpretation (cited in Moore 1988: 28).

At this point I return to the Jarawara, for whom parenthood is not synonymous with procreation. In this society, kinship can be said to be linked to a process of care and seduction, the desired effect of which is to ‘beautify/transform/repair/rejuvenate’ (*namosa*) relations and day-to-day life. As I have discussed elsewhere (Maizza 2014) these practices of *namosa* as transformation and seduction also contain the concept of *nayana*, translatable as ‘raising’ or ‘fostering’. Approximately a third of Jarawara children are raised by people who are not their biological parents. This ‘fostering’ takes place not because the child has been abandoned by its parents, as occurs with some adopted children in our society, but because the child has been seduced by other parents, who want to raise it. The child thus ‘chooses’ whether to stay with its parents or be raised by other people, with whom it will forge bonds that will be transformed over time into what we might call kinship or, as Sahlins formulates it (2011), ‘mutuality of being’. In other words, women do not need to be fertile, become pregnant or have sexual relations in order to be mothers. Indeed, the reproductive process is masculine: it is the man who ‘makes/works’ (*yamana*) the child in the woman’s belly. After birth, both the father and the mother must participate in raising the infant.

Since fertility does not seem to be something that holds the attention of the people about whom I am writing, my aim here is to remove it from the analytic panorama. It might be argued that the entire *mariná* festival, the topic of this article and the event on which this ethnography is based, is triggered by the girl’s first menstruation, and thus the appearance of blood, and consequently by the fact that, after her menarche, she will be fertile, ready to marry and have children. I do not discount this sequence entirely, as it may well make some sense. However, the evidence leads me to believe that in Jarawara society ‘marrying’ and ‘having children’ are not dependent on female fertility. Linking women to their reproductive capacities, to their bodies as we (westerners) conceive the body, may well produce a line of argument whose conclusion arrives back at its own initial premise, namely the idea that what differentiates men and women is their bodies. This formula is related to our own conception of what defines ‘being a woman’. I opt instead for a conception that takes as its reference point the idea that women’s problems are not the same everywhere (Strathern 1988: 33). If this is the case, then my question is what dispositions would qualify the feminine among the Jarawara.

### **The seven girls**

The *mariná* is what the anthropological literature would call a ‘female initiation ritual’. There exist three ways of referring to this type of event in Jarawara: 1) *mariná*; 2) *xicane*, the local Portuguese term; and 3) *ayaka*, the name for male songs (discussed shortly). I opt to use the term *mariná* since it is closer to the idea of a festival, a feast with lots of food, a banquet. Also I believe the word ‘festival’ is a better approximation of what people experience during these events than ‘ritual’.

At Dyimamirira’s *mariná* festival, which I witnessed, after the final night of dancing, some women and girls led the young ‘initiate’ to the stream to bathe her, apply perfume, comb her hair and dress her again in her festival clothing. Seven young women, all of whom had already been through the *mariná*, got dressed, combed their hair, put on lipstick and some feather headdresses (*atawa*) and wrapped shell rattles (*kikisiri*) around both ankles. While they were getting ready, they also made small canes (*awayori*) from the bark of a palm tree growing nearby. When they were all ready, the seven girls formed a single file and Dyimamirira, still with her eyes covered, was placed in the middle with two girls in front of her and five behind. They began the walk up from the river to the village clearing. Some other women accompanied them, singing the female *yowiri* songs. When they arrived at the clearing, they carried on walking and singing in single file with the canes made moments earlier held in their right hands.

All the guests had gathered in the clearing to watch, where about seven boys, were singing the *ayaka* male songs, circling around a trunk where all the dances were held over the three nights of the festival. Next to the trunk the shaman Kowisari was sitting in a chair, conducting the songs. The seven girls began to zig-zag towards the men’s circle, singing and jumping up and down so that the shells of their ankle rattles shook. They then formed a semicircle surrounding the smaller inner circle before moving away again in winding movements. They sang *yowiri*, while the men sang *ayaka*. This to-and-fro movement of the girls lasted a few minutes when suddenly they attacked the boys with their canes. One of them stayed by Dyimamirira’s side, holding her arm, ensuring that she did not fall or hurt herself during the short burst of rushing about. The boys imitated the grunt of peccaries and ran into the ‘forest’ to escape the women’s lashes. The atmosphere was one of joking and laughter among both those watching and those taking part in the finale.

After this sequence, formerly the girl would be tied face down on a tree trunk and then ‘whipped’ (*kokosia*) by some men, normally her ‘affines’. The whip used was a cane very similar to those carried by the seven girls. The middle of her back was whipped until her skin started bleeding, leaving a small scar for the rest of her life. Today, as has happened for more than a decade now, the parents, who decide how the festival will unfold, opt to omit use of the ‘whip’ (*kokosi*). The argument is that they are now believers (i.e. Christians).<sup>3</sup> As a result of missionary pressure, after the above sequence, instead of the girl being tied up to be whipped, she is made to sit down on a chair, the basket or hat (*boro*) that has covered her head throughout the festival and the blindfold covering her eyes both being removed, and she listens to various ‘sermons’ on how she should behave from this point on. These speeches, made by both men and women, the young and adults, and above all by those most closely linked to the pastors from Jocum, typically tell her that she must work, help, listen and obey her mother. After the speeches had ended, those present at Dyimamirira’s festival hugged her one by one, and the *mariná* was over: ‘Now she can “come out”’ (*ewa mate amake fahi waha*).

These final events, especially the walk up from the river to the village, the dance and the ‘attack’ on the boys by the seven girls, can be described as an example of what Houseman and Severi (2009) call ‘ritual condensation’, a concept related to the theory of schismogenesis formulated by Gregory Bateson (1936). The notion of ‘ritual condensation’ is defined as the simultaneity of antithetical modes of relations within the same sequence of action (Houseman and Severi 2009: 10). It amounts to an apex or culmination in which diverse relations mobilized during the course of a ritual are ‘made visible’ (*donner à voir*), combining relations that would normally comprise an antithesis. What are typically ‘condensed’, therefore, are contradictory relations. For this method of interpretation – one which I do not propose to develop here – it would be necessary to mobilize various dichotomies in Jarawara thought like ‘high/low’, ‘water/land’, ‘men/women’ and ‘guests/hosts’.

The sequence of the seven girls can also be connected to stories that we could call ‘myths’ or *hiyarabote*. One of these stories recounts that a woman, the mother of a nursing infant, wanted to

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<sup>3</sup> Evangelical missionaries from Jocum (Jovens Com Uma Missão: Youths with a Mission) and SIL (the Summer Institute of Linguistics) have been present in Jarawara villages since the 1970s. In two of the three villages, Casa Nova and Água Branca, the missionaries have their own houses and often end up living in there for a number of years. The Evangelicals do not seem to oppose the festivals discussed here, sometimes even using these moments to reinforce their doctrines. Some songs have become songs about Bible teachings, for example. However, they prohibit the girls from having their backs marked and are against all shamanistic practices.

go to a *mariná* festival to dance and asked her mother to look after the baby. The girl then painted her body, put on a dress made of red cloth (*yayafa*), attached a ‘tail’ (*dyifori*, *dyifo behe*) to herself and went to join the dancing. A number of things happened next, but here I simply wish to highlight the fact that this girl from the ‘mythic times’ dresses to look beautiful and take part in the dances in precisely the same way that the young woman in seclusion is dressed during her ‘coming out’ or ‘emergence’ festival. This clothing is also the attire used by the *inamati*, celestial beings, ‘plant people’, who represent ideals of beauty, strength and danger (Maizza 2012) and sing and dance with rattles on their feet in their never-ending festivals.

At the same time, however, the design painted on the girl’s body is the same design used on the trunk around which the nocturnal dances are performed, as well as on the length of wood on which the girls used to be placed to be whipped. It was suggested to me that this design represents the skin of the anaconda (*makehe*). The ‘snake beings’ (*yama maka*) are very important in Jarawara thought, perhaps being, along with jaguars (*dyome*), the most potent and dangerous beings in the cosmos. Meanwhile the ‘tail’ (*dyifori*) that the girl uses is reminiscent of a *timbó* (fish poison) vine root before it is placed in the water. These roots first need to be beaten so that, once placed in the water, they release a milky liquid that partially asphyxiates the fish, making it difficult for them to swim and easier for them to be caught or shot with arrows. In sum, the girl’s clothing and gestures on the days of the festival, like those of the seven girls, appear to refer to the *inamati* supra-humans, celestial beings associated with the above, while the girl’s body painting appears to refer to beings associated with water.

The final sequence of the festival also recalls the *hiyarabote* (ancient history or myth) of how people were turned into peccaries (*hiyama*). One day a man went off to fetch Brazil nuts and asked his relatives to wait for him. However, his relatives wanted to speak ‘like the noise of fire’ and, transformed (*rabika*) into peccaries, wandered off into the forest. When the man returned, he became furious with them for not waiting. So he went after the peccaries and shot many of them with blow darts. He even shot his wife, carried her off, smoked her and ate her. He broke the snout of his son, who turned back into a person. His sister was in seclusion, so he removed her from the *wawasa*, ‘whipped’ (*kokosi*) her, removed her ‘hat/basket’ (*boro*) and ‘released’ (*sobana*) her. He said: ‘Sister, you’re going to turn into a fish; I’m going to turn into a fish too.’ His sister turned into a *tambaqui* (a small fish related to the *pacu* and *piranha*), himself into an

*arapaima* (a very large freshwater fish) and his son into a bird. Here again we encounter an association of the girl in seclusion with water and a reference to the above with the bird.

My intention in assembling these different reference points is to highlight the idea that the festival can be understood by means of a symbolic or structuralist analysis that explores a series of dichotomies, parallelisms and inversions. The sequence of the seven girls seems to mobilize various kinds of beings of great importance in Jarawara cosmopolitics: peccaries, the *makehe* ‘snake beings’ and shamans, the *inamati*. Those beings appear to be in dialogue with what I propose to examine here, but not in the foreground, so to speak. Instead I adopt a phenomenological approach, based on my experience of Dyimamirira’s festival. I wish to use the final sequence of the *mariná* festival to emphasize a single point: the idea that the girl is being ‘taken’ (*towaka*) by the seven girls. ‘Being taken’ is the situation in which Dyimamirira was placed every time she left her *wawasa* from the day she entered it: she was always led by someone, or had her arm held, including when dancing. As we shall see, the state of always ‘being taken’ is connected to the fact that her eyes are blindfolded or her head covered. On festival days, even while inside the *wawasa*, she seems to be ‘taken’ by the effects of sleep, song and snuff (*sina*).<sup>4</sup> But we should start at the beginning.

### **Dream subjectivization**

On the day Dyimamirira menstruated for the first time, her mother Makeni and her maternal aunt (*amise*) Hinabori, helped by two of her sons, went to fetch *wawasa* palm leaves from areas close to the village. The objective was to make a small hut for Dyimamirira inside the family house where she would stay until the day of her *mariná* festival. This hut is named after the palm they went to fetch, *wawasa*. Her mother and her aunt spent all day working on the structure, first building a framework from branches bound with twine, then covering this ‘skeleton’ with the palm leaves. They left an opening on the side, hung up a length of cloth to act as a door, and suspended a small hammock from one corner of the cramped space to the other. The interior of the hut ended up very dark and fairly stuffy, measuring roughly two metres in length and one and a half in width. Dyimamirira’s hair was then cut and one of her brothers struck the ‘ceiling’ of the *wawasa* with a cane, thus beginning her period of seclusion.

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<sup>4</sup> This snuff (*sina*) is a substance made from *sina* (tobacco) leaves, crushed and mixed with the ashes made from the bark of cacao (*hoko*).

For about four months she spent the majority of her time alone inside the *wawasa*, lying in her hammock or sitting on a mat placed underneath the latter, making bead necklaces, playing with a doll, drawing and inhaling snuff (*sina*). Once a day one of her sisters would take her to bathe. She was led to the stream, following in her sister's footsteps or being led by the hand. As she went, a towel was placed on her head so that, I was told, she would be unable to see or be seen by men. At the end of the day or after the evening meal she received visits from her friends of the same age or a little older. The main concern of her mother (*ami*) and aunts (*amise*) during the day, as far as I could tell, was whether Dyimamirira had eaten. She was served various meals with flour, fish, rice and beans – a real abundance of food. I witnessed the start of Dyimamirira's seclusion, and when I returned some months later for her festival, I noticed that she had become fatter. My friends even queried me on this topic, wondering whether I had seen how 'chubby' (*gordinha* in Portuguese) or simply 'pretty' (*amosake* in Jarawara) she was.

Contrary to what might be imagined, spending days and days inside the *wawasa* brings about a variety of dispositions, but 'relaxing' or 'resting' are not among them. Over the course of the day, the heat and lack of light mean that the inside of the small hut becomes somewhat stuffy and lonely. Dyimamirira called for her mother and sisters at various times throughout the day, sometimes so she could go to the toilet, sometimes to ask for something, like water, and sometimes to complain of discomfort. Someone always had to stay close to the *wawasa* to 'care for' (*kakatoma*) Dyimamirira. When her mother wanted to spend the morning in the swidden, for instance, she would ask one of her daughters or sisters to stay near to the hut. At night things became even more tense. More than once Makeni (Dyimamirira's mother) told me that she was exhausted. She had slept badly because Dyimamirira had called for her a lot, crying in the early morning, saying that she was scared, afraid of the *inamati*, she was hot, she was feeling unwell. Makeni slept in a hammock suspended next to that of her husband, Dyimamirira's father, and she often had to wake him for him to sleep somewhere else so their daughter could sleep with her and they could finally get some rest.<sup>5</sup> The experience of living within the *wawasa* was described to me by the young women who had recently been through it as one of fear and anxiety. As the festival approaches, these sensations increase in intensity. The girls become very 'worried' (*aawawa na*) about what will happen to them during the *mariná*. The night before her

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<sup>5</sup> Men, even the girl's father, cannot see her during her period of seclusion. Or rather, she cannot see any men during her seclusion.

festival, Dyimamirira was unable to sleep; ‘she was crazy’ (*rabika*) according to her father, and ended up talking a lot with her mother. Eventually she fell sleep, once again in the hammock with Makeni.

Kamo (Dyimamirira’s father) had decided on a date to ‘release’ (*sobana*) his daughter, four full moons after she entered the *wawasa*. I returned to Casa Nova especially for the occasion. As the ‘agreed’ day approached, Dyimamirira’s brother organized a football competition. However, it seemed difficult to name the precise day the festival would begin: people explained that some things needed to be done beforehand. The first was the competition (taking up a full day), and the second was the need to wait two or three days after the football event so that the men – both hosts and guests – could go off hunting and return with game meat (*bani*). And that is what happened. The scene described in the opening of this article occurred at the end of the day of football. The next morning, after the night of *forró* music, the *yara* (‘white’) male and female guests left. Some men from the neighbouring village of Saubinha stayed to go hunting and remained until the day of the festival. Others, young parents in particular, went back home and returned to Casa Nova three days later.

The festival began on the fourth day after the football contest, when at around nine in the morning one of Dyimamirira’s younger brothers (*ayo*) struck the roof of the *wawasa* with a cane and then left. Various women then came to sit beside the hut and began to chant the *eé* songs. These are songs that the shamans hear sung by the women of the *neme* (‘upper layer’) during their visits and ‘bring back’ (*kaki*) to teach their wives and daughters – the ones who really know the songs. Each of them tells of an animal species, describing, so to speak, a specific characteristic or action. The refrain of the songs, which I surmise is the source of their name (*eé*), is always the same: ‘*E hinari, eé hinari*’. This can be translated as ‘it’s what they recounted, what was said’. These are high-pitched and compelling songs, which, due to the constant repetition of the refrain and the height of the note, give the impression of being one single and infinite song. The women who were there when Dyimamirira’s *mariná* began sang the whole day, without pausing, until 5 pm, when the space fell silent. Dyimamirira was listening from her hammock: the songs were being sung for her. Some singers left and came back, others stayed for the morning only, and others arrived after lunch, but many spent the entire day sitting down, leading or following the songs. While they sat around singing, some looked after their small children, others made necklaces, others painted their nails, and those nearest to Dyimamirira

worked on finishing the details of the clothes she would wear that night and on the other two nights of dancing.

At the end of the day the *ee* songs ceased, and people went to bathe and get ready for the feast that would begin in the early evening. Kamo and Makeni, the girl's parents, had stocked up for months on manioc flour and bought rice and pasta; the men who had gone hunting had brought back monkeys, peccaries and birds. The feast was lavish. All the guests, around a hundred people, received a full plate of food and a glass of fizzy drink. After the dinner there was a moment of rest, but not for Dyimamirira, who received visits in her *wawasa* and inhaled snuff with her girlfriends during this time before, at about 11 pm, her mother (*ami*), aunts (*amise*) and 'sisters' (*ati/asima*) began to dress her for the nocturnal songs and dancing. First they put on her cotton skirt dyed with annatto (*yayafa*), followed by a belt with two feather details, one on each side, then the shell rattles (*kikisiri*) on both ankles and a 'tail' (*dyifori*) made from *moriche* palm leaves (*dyifo*), with its tip dyed with annatto. Finally her eyes were covered with a cloth blindfold and a basket (*boro*) was placed on her head, decorated with four red macaw feathers, one on each corner, sticking upwards. At this point, I think, she should also have been painted. In her case, however, this did not take place since there was no *genipap* with which to paint the designs in black (the painting is done using red annatto and black *genipap*).

During this first night, which was, we recall, Dyimamirira's first day of emergence after months of seclusion, the women closest to her, including myself, were really excited, ready to make it a lovely night of dancing. Some minutes earlier, male guests had arrived surreptitiously in the house where most of the people were gathered waiting and beat the hut roof. This prompted everyone to stand up and imitate woolly monkeys (*wafa*), creating a lot of laughter and leaving the atmosphere buzzing. However, when Dyimamirira finally left the house, climbed down the stairs<sup>6</sup> and reached the clearing where the dances would be held, she began to feel unwell. She was unable to stay on her feet and whispered that she was very tired, almost finding it difficult to breathe. So they fetched a chair for her to sit on, and for a while she stood up and sat down again on the chair, exhausted by these few movements. I was fairly worried and thought that the festival would not continue, but my friend Hinabori, who was by my side observing, told me that this was very normal: 'Dyimamirira was tired'.

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<sup>6</sup> All the houses are raised high on stilts.

As noted earlier, the girl's period of isolation is far from being quiet or a time of rest. In my view, this first moment when we see Dyimamirira 'on stage', so to speak, shows how exhausted she is before the festival even begins. The months spent inside her dark *wawasa*, marked by days of solitude, fear, anxiety, discomfort and sleepless nights, can, as seems to have been the case here, give her first emergence a 'sensory explosion'. Her body is different, now more rounded, fatter and heavier. In my view, the *boro* hat and the blindfold stimulate senses other than vision: it was as though Dyimamirira was suddenly experiencing the effects of her months of isolation all at once, and as the festival progressed, so these effects would become stronger and more vividly present.

Some women then started the *yowiri* female songs and dances, and the circle became fuller and fuller. Dyimamirira was placed in the middle to dance. During the first few hours she had to sit down various times, still feeling tired, but from early morning onwards she no longer paused. She danced the entire night, always being taken or held by two people, one on each side, turning to one side and then the other, hearing, but never singing, the *yowiri* female songs, and jumping hard on the ground from time to time so that her ankle shells rattled loudly. As dawn broke, she was taken by her 'sisters' to the stream, her *boro* was removed and she was bathed; then her *boro* was put back on, followed by her dress, and she was taken back to her *wawasa*. I imagine she was exhausted, but she had scarcely entered the hut and climbed into her hammock when various women (not those who had spent the night dancing) arrived, sat down and began the *eé* songs.

The entire next day unfolded in the same way, filled with *eé* songs, followed by a meal, visits, getting dressed and nocturnal dances, now with male songs (*ayaka*). At dawn there was more bathing and a return to the *wawasa*, followed by *eé*, a meal, visits and dances, now with the shaman Kowisari leading the *ayaka* songs. Three days and three nights passed. I had decided to record the *mariná* songs and so I looked to accompany Dyimamirira the whole time. As I said at the beginning, her mother had given me a good spot to stay in, a few meters from her daughter's *wawasa*, which provided me with a pleasant proximity. What I can say is that I almost never slept, except during the early evening before the dances began, while Dyimamirira was receiving visits in her *wawasa*. I ended up numb with tiredness, which seemed to make the people who saw me pleased. I was asked various times whether I was sleepy, almost as though validating my experience of the *mariná*. While I slept very little, Dyimamirira must have gone without any

sleep whatsoever – or rather, she was not given a single moment when she could sleep. There was always someone singing by her side, or else she was accompanied inhaling snuff, or in the middle of a dance circle.

The actions of the *mariná* seem to configure a situation in which the girl at the centre of it sleeps little. All the signs are that Dyimamirira experienced a state of constant drowsiness during the festival as a result of her lack of sleep, as though the lack of (prolonged) sleep meant that she could dream at any moment, as though she found herself in a condition of drowsiness (*nokobisa*) and tiredness (*amaha*) that led her into a dream-like state. Sleep would function almost as a drug that would make her ‘dream’ and leave her ‘light’. Light here is not an antonym of ‘heavy’ but means ‘takeable’, facilitating ‘being taken’ (*towakama*), ‘being carried’ (*weyena*), ‘being brought/led’ (*kaki*). These are the ideas that will guide me through the final section of the article.

### **Making oneself taken**

During my stays in Casa Nova, people explained to me that the ‘soul’ (*abono*, *kanamori*) can detach itself from the body and have experiences with other kinds of beings. These experiences are dangerous and undesired since they indicate an out-of-control state, which may even lead to death. Being sick is one of these states, where the ‘soul’ (*abono*) has been captured, held or stolen by other kinds of beings and stays there with them, in their villages, as the body becomes ill. The ‘soul’ needs to be located, brought back (*kaki*) and placed inside the body again, a task undertaken by the plant-children of the shaman who are summoned by him. I was told a story in which two female souls (two ‘female monkey’ souls) captured the ‘soul’ of a man when he was hunting alone in the forest, secured and tied the soul up with twine and asked to marry him. The man became very sick, but in the end he was ‘cured’ by the shaman Kanabono.

Dreaming is an experience similar to falling ill. Okomobi told me that, ‘when we sleep, the body remains in the hammock, but the soul travels to the “sky” (*neme*), visiting, staying there talking’. Many times when I was staying in Casa Nova, in the early morning, huddled around the fire warming those already out of their hammocks, someone told me that he or she had ‘dreamt with the soul’ (*inamati*). The conversation was very brief, just an indication of the unfortunate incident, which always left the person concerned very worried. An older man once told me of a disturbing dream in which he had been wrapped up in the kind of line used in fishing nets: an *inamati* had bound him up and placed him upside down. When he awoke he discovered his

hammock was squeezing him. It is as though life here and life in dreams (the life of the ‘souls’, the *inamati*) are parallel worlds that can align at certain moments, the dream experience being a powerful form of this kind of passage from one reality to another, one perspective to another (Lima 1999).

In the Jarawara language, the involuntary state in which the soul detaches itself from the body is called *labirika* or *rabika*, translated into Portuguese as *ficar doido*, ‘going crazy’. Indeed I have heard the term *labirika* used in cases of sickness, fever (malaria), drunkenness, panic attacks, secret love affairs and other situations. The concept is also mobilized in the narratives of the ancient times, in the ‘myths’ (*hiyarabote*) indicating the moment when a kind of person metamorphizes (forever) into an animal species. However, I never heard this term being used for a shaman, precisely someone who experiences encounters with other kinds of being. The shaman’s knowledge of the world and of the various worlds is woven during journeys through which he sees after inhaling snuff and being ‘carried’ (*weye*) on the backs of his plant-children, arriving in distant villages and meeting the people and other beings that inhabit them. In a shaman’s *ayaka* (songs) we can hear their stories, like the day he arrived in a village in the *neme* and everyone was singing, dancing, holding a *mariná*, or another time in another village ‘there above’ (*nemeya*), when he was pursued by a jaguar.

Davi Kopenawa, in the book written with Bruce Albert, translated as *The Falling Sky*, talks of his experience as a shaman. This experience is linked to travelling and learning about the world of the *xapiri* – souls, ghosts and celestial beings, who correspond to the Jarawara *inamati* – beautiful, shining, the ideal of beauty and humanity. He says that to undertake these voyages, he himself has ‘become a ghost’, ‘become *xapiri*’ (Kopenawa and Albert 2013: 277), in one of two ways: either through nasal ingestion of the hallucinogenic substance called *yākoana*, or through dreams (ibid.: 24). While these are the ideal means of ‘becoming a ghost’, over the course of the book Davi also indicates other ways, more involuntary, where this can happen to anyone, not just shamans. These include drinking banana soup in the *reahu* feast (ibid.: 148); drinking *cachaça* (ibid.: 264); during sickness and fevers (ibid.: 287); after eating unknown food like that of white people (ibid.: 319); when someone is in real pain or very angry (ibid.: 358); and in dreams. While dreaming, everyone has access to the world of the *xapiri*, but ordinary people (non-shamans) do not travel very far (ibid.: 376).

In such circumstances (the list is not exhaustive) we are presented with what anthropologists call a separation between soul and body, and what Davi calls ‘becoming a ghost’. The soul’s experience is of a journey. This journey, as Kopenawa says, also connects with other space-times. He recounts that sometimes when he ‘becomes a ghost’ he sees events from what anthropologists would call myths. For example, one day he found himself living in the time when his ancestors turned into animals (ibid.: 61). For Davi dreaming, becoming a ghost, is the way of knowing par excellence. ‘When we [Yanomami] truly want to know things we people of the forest try to see them in dream’ (ibid.: 379). In this apprenticeship, the *xapiri*, the celestial beings, souls, ghosts, are the teachers. ‘This is our way of becoming wise. We people of the forest never forget the distant places we have visited in dream’ (ibid.: 380).

Going back to the *mariná*, it seems to me that the primary effect of the period of isolation is to stimulate the girl to dream. The tiredness instilled in her during her seclusion is transformed over the course of the festival into a disposition of deep drowsiness (*nokobisa*), which in turn is experienced as a dream state. She becomes very tired, very sleepy, and for this reason ‘light’ (in the sense of ‘takeable’). This disposition enables her to ‘go’, to ‘be taken’, to meet beings from other space-times, to have experiences, to gain knowledge of the world and of the various different worlds, to encounter the *inamati* in their houses ‘there above’ and to learn from them. The elements that enable this takeable agency are sleep, the *eé* songs and snuff. Marilyn Strathern tells us that, in Hagen, rites constructed ways of knowing the capacities of the body (Strathern 1988: 103) and that the evidence for these capacities rested on the efficacy of the action, implying, in Melanesia, a relation (ibid.: 123). The desired effect of the ‘male initiation rituals’ in Hagen is to bring the body to consciousness and, in the Melanesian idiom, show the impact of people’s minds upon one another (ibid.: 131). If we turn to consider Dyimamirira’s festival and her disposition to dream, we could venture the suggestion that the *mariná* seeks to bring the ‘soul’ to consciousness, to show the capacities of the ‘soul’, to show that ‘souls’ can be ‘taken’ (*towaka*), ‘brought’ (*kaki*), ‘carried’ (*weye*) and ‘held’ (*tama*), and that these dislocations are important forms of knowledge. I believe that ‘being takeable’, ‘carriable’, is a quality potentially linked to female agency, a quality *revealed* to women during the *mariná*.

At the same time, during the festival Dyimamirira experienced a heavier, fattened body. The nocturnal dances in which she jumped energetically to make her *karakisi* (ankle shells) rattle felt the force of her weight striking the ground. This body is also beautiful – a beautiful woman is a

full-bodied woman – and, during the *mariná*, it is even more beautiful after being painted, adorned, decorated and beautifully dressed. In addition, the atmosphere is filled with beauty due to the songs and dances, and also with the ‘joy’ and ‘animation’ of the guests and hosts. In sum, it seems to me that the idea of a heavy body is not incompatible with the concept of ‘being takeable’. Shamans (*inawa*) are travellers who move about ‘carried’ on the backs (*weye*) of ‘celestial’ beings (their plant-children). These same shamans are said to have various ‘stones’ (*arabani*, *yama nakora*) inserted into their bodies over their lifetimes. These ‘souls’, which are also media used in spells (Maizza 2012), are like small pieces of gold, shining and dense, which may convey a certain notion of weight in the bodies of shamans.

Other ‘carriable’ beings in the Jarawara world – for which the terms *weye*, *towaka*, *kaki* and *tamaka* are equally employed – are children, who are transported in slings on walks until they are at least four years old; some kinds of cultivated plants, which are first planted close to the houses before being taken to the swidden gardens as saplings; prey, which are captured in the forest and carried dead to the houses; sick people who should be taken to the city; and the ‘souls’ (*kanamori*) of the dead, which are carried by their plant-children to the upper layer (*neme*). In all these cases, there appears to be no contradiction between ‘being heavy’ and ‘being takeable’. In the case of the girls in seclusion and the shamans, I believe that the use of snuff is an important factor in being taken away, but I am unable to develop this point in greater depth here.

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Our way of conceptualizing the problems explored in anthropology tends to lead us to superimpose analytic categories (Strathern 1980) and to end up producing chains of premises. Very often these chains make sense only to ourselves but not to the people with whom we work, passing unnoticed both by those who formulate them and by their readers. A good example of this kind of procedure is the opposition woman/nature/domestic versus man/culture/public, discussed at the beginning of this article. In the case of the *mariná* and its effects, I would tend to superimpose the categories ‘woman’, ‘heavy body’ and ‘prey.’ One of the motives for this, perhaps, is the fact that I have taken as a basis the argument that in indigenous Amazonian societies the gender distinction is eclipsed by the dichotomies ‘humans versus non-humans’ or ‘prey versus predators’ (Descola 2001, Vilaça 2005: 451, Taylor and Viveiros de Castro 2006: 173). Thus women have sometimes been metaphorically qualified in ethnographies as ‘prey’

(Taylor 2000).

I too initially thought that seclusion and the festival of the Jarawara girls could be a way of transforming them into ‘peccary-women’. However, after participating in Dyimamirira’s festival and exposing myself to other possible understandings, I have explored the idea that the *mariná* does not place women in the position of prey, but rather that seclusion and the festivals reveal women to have a number of qualities *analogous* to those of prey, like ‘being heavy’ and the capacity ‘to be taken’. This does not make women prey, still less the ‘prey of men’: the latter formulation is perhaps more revealing of our own idea, already mentioned earlier, that nature submits to culture and that this is visible in a supposedly universal female submission. The qualities cited above are not exclusive to prey: they are also attributed to other subjects, including shamans. They point to a form of agency that enables women to journey, to leave, to acquire knowledge by means of their dreams. They bring women closer to shamanic knowledge and the complicated networks of cosmo-political relations in which shamans are inserted. In conclusion, ‘domestic’ and ‘woman’ are perhaps not categories that overlap, at least not among the Jarawara.<sup>7</sup> ‘Takeable’ (*towaka*) and ‘carriable’ (*weye*) female agency projects women more towards a possible ‘outside’ than a possible ‘inside’.

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<sup>7</sup> See Lea (2000) for a similar opinion concerning Mebengôkre women.

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FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION/CUTTING IN BASSE-CASAMANCE (SENEGAL):  
MULTIPLE VOICES FROM A PLURAL SOUTH

JORDI TOMÀS, ADRIANA KAPLAN AND MARIE-ALIX LE CHARLES<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract.** In this article, we present an ethnographic study of female genital mutilation or cutting (FGM/C), referred to here as excision, in relation to female initiation in the Basse-Casamance region of Senegal. There is a wide disparity in the descriptions of ethnicity, territorialization, history and vitality connected with the practice, as might be expected given the extensive diversity of the region. For most of the communities that practice it, excision forms part of the rite of passage that promotes integration into the secret society of women, being considered also a marker of ethnic, religious, gender and political identities. Despite the legislation outlawing this practice in Senegal since 1999 and the numerous awareness-raising initiatives carried out by NGOs, the practice has not been abandoned. However, the public nature and timing of the three phases of the ritual have been modified, the excision now being performed clandestinely at an early age, while initiation (seclusion and aggregation) takes place in public during adolescence. This study draws attention to the different perspectives regarding FGM/C and its current practice, highlighting changes to it and the tensions it creates between its supporters and detractors, who are mostly men, as well as revealing the views of young people, among whom the first signs of a wider consciousness of the consequences of the practice are becoming evident.

## Introduction

### *Objectives*

The main objective of this study is to gather different narratives of the practice of female genital mutilation or cutting (FGM/C), or what we here call excision, in the Basse-Casamance region of Senegal. The diversity of the region and the cultural changes that have taken place there in recent years following the introduction of a law banning the practice make this discourse analysis essential to enable a holistic understanding of the current situation.

The study thus seeks to understand why excision is still being performed in the area today, as well as to assess the impact of the law and the work of the government and NGOs in the area in the last two decades. This investigation considers the diversity of views and practices, as well as highlighting the multiple local tensions that arise from the intersectionality of visions and social models. On the one hand there are those who believe that excision is a fundamental part of a woman's life, while on the other hand others reject the practice. In this regard, the study brings together the voices of women, men and young people from different ethnic and religious origins, situating the practice of excision in a large plurality of social, political and religious contexts.

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<sup>1</sup> All authors: Fundació Wassu-UAB, Edifici Mòdul de Recerca a Campus Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona 08193 – Bellaterra (Barcelona), Spain. E-mail: [fundacio.wassu@uab.cat](mailto:fundacio.wassu@uab.cat); Tel. +34 93 586 87 99; [www.mgf.uab.cat](http://www.mgf.uab.cat)

### *Methods*

The research started with a review of the available anthropological literature on identity, ritual and FGM/C in the region in order to contextualize the subject of the study. The study itself is based on ethnographic observation and qualitative research in the departments of Bignona, Oussouye and Ziguinchor in Basse-Casamance (Senegal), carried out between February and June 2018. To reconstruct and interweave the different opinions and narratives about the practice of FGM/C, 23 in-depth interviews and 47 semi-structured interviews were conducted, targeting people from different spheres of society such as teachers, health professionals, representatives of the administration, members of NGOs, students, civic leaders and leaders of religious associations. Also, two focus groups were held with senior circumcisers and another two with health professionals. The research also included a survey administered to students in order to capture opinions on FGM/C by young people. A hundred and thirty open-ended questionnaires were collected in five different institutes.

Although fieldwork in the region has been intensive since 1994, and one of the researchers speaks Joola Kasa, one of the major local languages, the investigation presented some difficulties related to interlocutors' fears of speaking openly due to the law banning FGM/C. For ethical reasons and reasons of confidentiality, in many cases the names and towns of origin of interviewees have been omitted.

### **Background**

#### *Basse-Casamance, a crucible of identities*

Basse-Casamance is one of the three administrative regions of the Casamance area and is commonly known as the Région de Ziguinchor. It is located in southern Senegal, between Gambia and Guinea Bissau, and consists of the area along the Casamance River. With a population of 621,171, it is divided administratively into three departments, Ziguinchor, Bignona and Oussouye. The Joola, who are divided into various subgroups, represent the majority of the population in the area, along with the Manding, the Fula or Pehl, the Bainunk (also the oldest ethnic group in Basse-Casamance), the Manjack, the Mancagne and the Balanta, among others. Catholicism, traditional religion and Islam coexist in the territory. Local Muslim practitioners follow the Tijaniyya and Qadriyya brotherhoods, and a minority the Muridiyya.

Casamance has experienced a very long political and military conflict since 1982, when the Mouvement de Forces Démocratiques de Casamance (MFDC) made a demand for independence. Some MFDC factions signed a peace treaty with the government in December 2004, but others

continue to be active in the region, and there are still periodic clashes with government forces. Furthermore, political tensions and military confrontations are expressed in the feelings of the local population, whether for independence or not. The sentiment that the faraway ‘Northerners’ of Senegal despise their cultures and traditions is widespread. People distinguish their identity as ‘we, the Casamance’ from ‘them, the Northerners’ or even ‘the Senegalese’. Far from being homogeneous, however, Basse-Casamance is a melting pot of diverse cultures, continually subject to political instability, a region where complex belief systems converge, often with substantial internal divisions, which interact with specific personal and family situations, depending on a multitude of contexts.

### *FGM/C, prevalence and territorialization in Basse-Casamance*

For most of the ethnic groups in Senegal that practise it, FGM/C forms part of a rite of passage that affirms the girl’s belonging to the community and confers ethnic, religious and gender identities on her. According to the Agence Nationale de la Statistique et de la Demographie 2018 (data collected in 2017), 24% of Senegalese women aged 15-49 have undergone the practice. The prevalence rate has not changed significantly in the past ten years, declining only from 28% in 2005 to 24% in 2015. Ethnically, 75% of the Manding (Sosse), 63% of the Soninké, 59% of the Joola (or Diola) and 49% of the Pehl (Pular, Fula and Haalpularen)<sup>2</sup> continue with the tradition. In the southern and eastern regions, the six areas with the highest rates are Kédougou (91%), Sédhiou (76%), Matam (73%), Tambacounda (72%), Ziguinchor (68%) and Kolda (64%). Therefore, in Casamance (that is, Ziguinchor in Basse-Casamance, Sedhiou in Moyenne-Casamance and Kolda in Haute-Casamance) nearly seven out of ten women have undergone this practice. For girls aged 0-14 years, the rates are 38% in Ziguinchor, 43% in Sedhiou and 35% in Kolda.

Interest in FGM/C in Senegal, and particularly in Casamance (Kaplan 2002, Kaplan and Risler 2004, Kaplan et al. 2013a, 2013b), has long been evident. It is mentioned in general studies of the local population carried out by ethnographers, historians and geographers at the end of the nineteenth century (especially Zaborowski 1894), and above all during the 1950s and 1960s (Thomas 1959, Pelissier 1966, Trincaz 1981, Reveyrand-Coulon 1982, Linares 1992, De Jong 2001). Research focused on the practice of excision itself, adopting different approaches, appeared in the 1990s (Mottin-Sylla 1990, on the Senegal level; Dellenborg 1996, 2004, 2009 on Basse-

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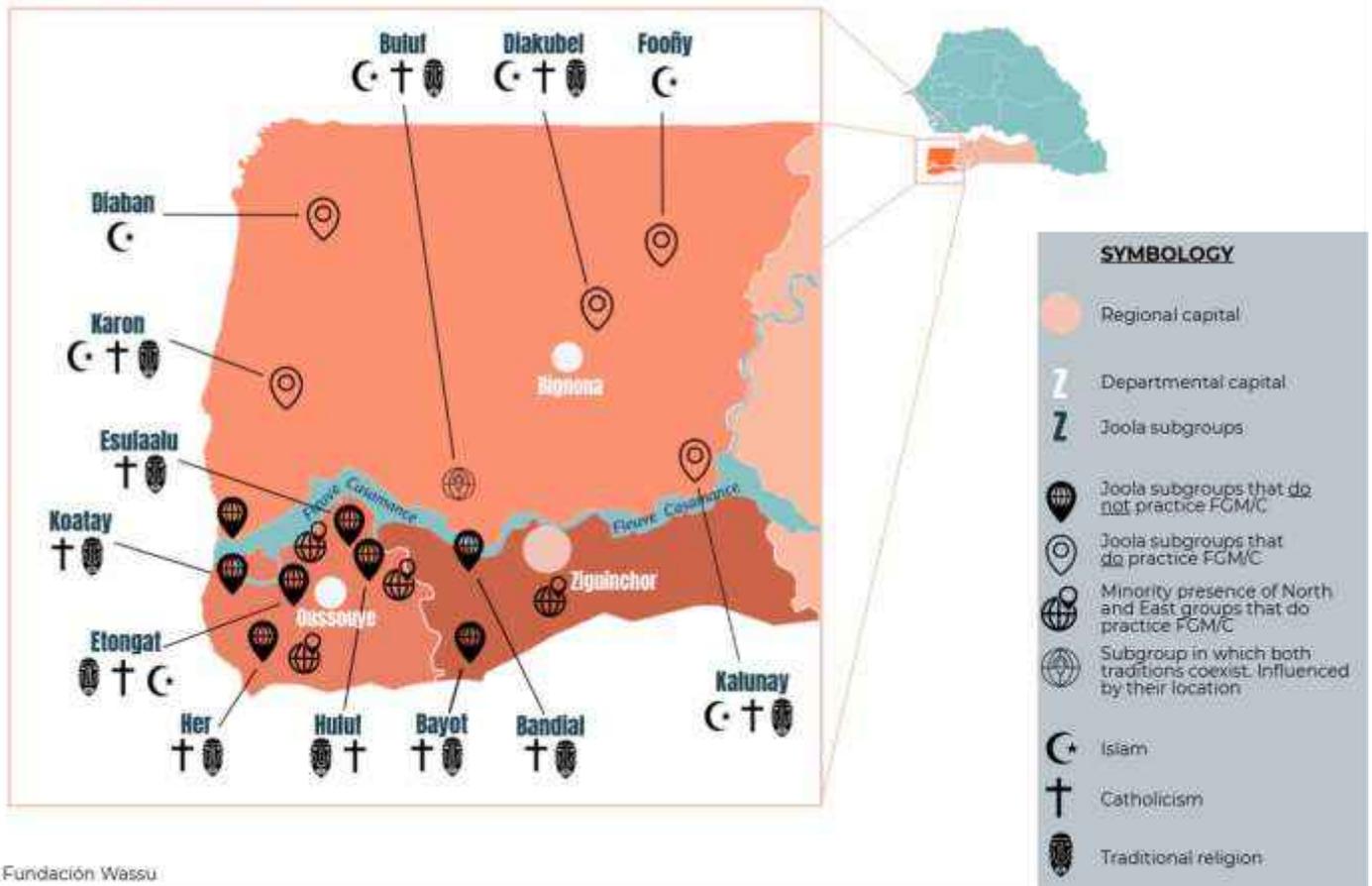
<sup>2</sup> When we compare these figures with those published at the end of the 1980s, it is clear that the prevalence rates do not vary much. Almost thirty years before the law banning the practice was enacted, the following figures were recorded at the Senegalese national level: Joola 49.27%, Mandé 74.45% and Pular 53.13%, although the same author points out that in the latter case the figure was probably higher; while among what were then called the ‘ethnicities of the south’ (Bainunk, Balanta, Manjack, Mancagne, etc.) the rate was 25% (Mottin-Sylla 1990: 23).

Casamance) and has continued especially since 2000, when the Senegalese government banned the practice, aiming at its eradication by 2015, and several NGOs began to work in the area (see studies at the Senegalese national level: Diop and Askew 2009, Shell-Duncan et al. 2013, Kandala and Komba 2015, Thiam 2015, Camara 2017; and at the regional level, e.g. O'Neill 2018 on the Futa Toro).

However, the various studies of the region do not coincide with the groups or areas where FGM/C is practised. While some claim that it is not performed south of the Casamance River, as in Oussouye, or that Catholics and followers of the traditional religion have never practised it, others maintain that FGM/C is carried out only north of the Casamance River among people practising the traditional religion and those of Muslim faith. Some studies assert that some Catholic families engage in the practice (Motin Sylla 1990). Other research claims that only the Joola, Manding and Pehl perpetuate this tradition, and that other groups, such as the Bainunk or the Balanta, do not. There is a wide disparity in the descriptions of ethnicity, territorialization, history and vitality connected with the practice, as might be expected, given the great diversity of the region.

The origin of FGM/C is also a matter of debate. Some women who perform it and several

**FGM/C practice and religions among the joola of the Lower Casamance**



reports from local and international NGOs define the practice as ancestral, as having been inherited from generation to generation for centuries. However, some ethnographic studies and information obtained in some interviews during this research suggest that the practice is relatively recent.

*Origin of FGM/C in Basse-Casamance, Mandinguization and new gender relations*

Historically in Basse-Casamance, Islamization and Mandinguization have gone hand in hand. Even today, in the Joola language spoken by practitioners of the traditional religion, especially south of the Casamance River, the ethnonym 'Emanding' is used to refer to Muslims. The process of Mandinguization is key to understanding how the practice expanded in the area. Testimonies from the end of the nineteenth century confirm that Senegalese Manding groups were already performing FGM/C at that time (Zaborowski 1894). Moreover, it is through the Manding that the Joola from the north of the Casamance river (Buluf, Foogny, Karon, Diaban and Diakubel groups) and some Balanta and Bainunk groups east of Ziguinchor adopted the practice a little more than a century ago (Thomas 1959, Pelissier 1966, Trincaz 1981, Roche 1985, Linares 1992, Motin-Sylla 1990, De Jong 2001, Diédhiou 2004).

These groups, which practised the traditional religion through their altars and shrines (in Joola Fogny called *enáti* or *sinaati*), were strongly influenced by the Manding between the end of the nineteenth century and the Second World War. This was not so much an impact of the *jihads* of that time, but of a subsequent change of attitude in the local populations towards the religion and culture brought by the Manding (Pelissier 1966). Many inhabitants of the eastern and northern areas of the present department of Bignona abandoned their altars, adopted Islam and changed many of their customs, giving up drinking palm wine and meetings at the altars, and adopting new ways of dressing and of perceiving sexuality (Pelissier 1966, Mark 1976, Baum 1999, Meguelle 2013). Mandinguization also reached other groups such as the Balanta and the Bainunk, although to only a limited extent. This explains why, in some of the villages in the southeast of Basse-Casamance, male and female initiation is practised, while the rest of the Bainunk, who live more to the west, and most of the Balanta of Guinea-Bissau do not practise it.

From the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century, southwest of the Casamance River, where neither Mandinguization nor the practice of excision had arrived, families of several practising groups from northern Senegal, east and north of the Casamance area, settled in the area. They continue to practice excision despite the fact that their neighbours, the Joola Kasa, do not. Fieldwork enabled us to confirm that in some neighbourhoods of Elinkin and Oussouye (in Muslim immigrant communities, for example), as well as near Cap Skiring, excision was practised until at least the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This does not mean that all Muslims in the department

performed FGM/C: fishing, tourism, commerce and administration also attracted other Muslims who do not do so, such as the Wolof and Serer.<sup>3</sup> Some of them settled in towns in the departments of Oussouye, Bignona and Ziguinchor, or in their capitals, without adopting this practice from their neighbours, despite the fact that they were also Muslims.

The adoption of Manding culture also brought about a change in gender relations.<sup>4</sup> As explained by De Jong (2001) and especially Dellenborg (2004, 2009), excision and female initiation appeared in the context of tensions, linked to Mandinguization, involving the traditional role of women, which was weakening in face of the new power acquired by men. Both authors state that the women of the region adopt these practices of Manding origin to give themselves greater power in relation to the men of their community. Many of the women interviewed for our research felt that excision gave them power and strength over men and life, even more so than initiation. This is mainly explained by the egalitarian characteristics of Joola society. Before the arrival of Islam and Mandinguization, society was structured through kinship and the altars of the traditional religion. Through the many female altars, it was possible for women's views to influence profoundly many decisions affecting both the feminine world and the entire community.<sup>5</sup>

In some places in the Buluf, men opposed to women adopting this new practice went so far as to burn down the premises where FGM/C was carried out. Even now there are still Joola Buluf men who claim that 'this is not a Joola tradition. Our grandmothers did not do it'. Conversely, a circumciser from a village near Diouloulou said: 'If women are free, it is precisely because we perform excision. This makes us equal to men ... it even makes us stronger than them!' In addition, according to several women, excision is the gateway to an entire chain of events whereby access is granted to initiation and later on to other higher levels that allow intervention and decision-making with regard to various issues related to health, motherhood, education and the town's administration, among others.

Although in some areas of Basse-Casamance this process began early in the twentieth century, in others it has been adopted in relatively recent times, not without internal tensions. In the 1960s in Jilapom, north of Bignona, women of the traditional religion who rejected excision were marginalized by other women. Even some Joola men, who were against excision, complained that 'the Manding have ruined our women' (Linares 1992: 110). Exceptionally, in some places like Nioumoun (in the northern area of the mouth of the Casamance), the women gathered at their altars

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<sup>3</sup> A minority of Serer of the Sine-Saloum, in west central Senegal, practise MGF.

<sup>4</sup> For information about the Manding culture of Moyenne-Casamance, see Schaffer and Cooper 1980, Schaffer 2003, Tounkara 1996.

<sup>5</sup> For a historical account of Joola women's power and traditional religion, see Baum 2015.

belonging to the traditional religion, debated the situation, and ended up mainly rejecting the female excision that their neighbours, like the Joola, were adopting.

*FGM/C penalization: a foreign law and a distant administration?*

Due to the mobilization of groups of women and associations dedicated to development and human rights, such as the Collectif des Femmes Parlamentaires, on 29 January 1999 Law 99/05 was passed making FGM/C a criminal offence punishable by up to five years in prison. Six years later, in 2005, a new law (2005-18 of 5 August, Article 4) requires reproductive health services to take part in the fight against FGM/C. In 2006, the Senegalese government also signed the so-called Maputo Protocol.<sup>6</sup>

When people in Casamance found out that Senegalese law was going to prohibit excision from the end of 1998, Joola and Manding women banded together and demonstrated in Ziguinchor to request the bill be annulled. This protest march was organized at a time when there was a high degree of tension in the area, with its strong military presence due to the conflict between the MFDC and the Senegalese government (Diédhiou 2004).

One year after the passing of Law 99/05 in 2000, the government launched its Plan d'Action National pour l'Abandon de la Pratique de Mutilations Sexuelles. In 2005 a new study was carried out throughout the Casamance region, noting that there had been some progress in raising awareness among women, but that there was still a long way to go. For this reason, in 2010, the government decided to start a new program, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Plan d'Action National pour l'Accélération de l'Abandon de l'Excision / Mutilations Génitales Féminines (2010-2015), which was introduced in several areas (UNFPA-UNICEF 2013; UNICEF 2016).

At the judicial level, the Senegalese authorities have acted half-heartedly against a handful of women in Matam, Kaolack and Kolda who practise excision. For example, in a village in the department of Velingara, in the Kolda region, three women were arrested at the end of 2001 but freed in an amnesty half a year later (Gomis and Wone 2008). In Matam an exciser was arrested in 2009, which led to a number of clashes between several *talibés*<sup>7</sup> and the gendarmerie (UNFPA-UNICEF 2013). In 2015 an exciser and two of her deputies were arrested in Sindhiang Dembayel, near Kolda, when, with other women, they were performing excision on a group of girls. In Basse-Casamance the most notorious case arose in 2017 in Kafountine, in which some two hundred girls

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<sup>6</sup> The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa aims to guarantee comprehensive rights to women, including improved autonomy in their reproductive health decisions and an end to female genital mutilation.

<sup>7</sup> Term used in some West African countries to design boys who study the Quran at a Daara (the equivalent of a *mad-rasa*).

were initiated, with hundreds of women arriving in trucks from neighbouring towns to participate, openly and publicly, in the celebration. Most of the girls had already been mutilated at a young age, but they had not yet been initiated, and only a few underwent excision at that time. The two circumcisers who led the initiation were taken to the police station, where the gendarmes were confronted by elderly women appealing to the women of the families of the gendarmes, who also adhered to the tradition. Ultimately a formal complaint against two circumcisers was filed by the Senegalese administration.

In this context of the legal enforcement of the practice, the general perception is that the law has had little influence on the population and that in any case it was a mistake to pass it without first raising awareness of the issue. In this regard, a woman from Abène said: 'Joola women are not very concerned about the law. This is a thing of the people. The law has no power, it cannot intervene. (...) When the law intervenes, there are more problems. First you have to talk to the women, and then the administration will follow. How many years has the government been coming here? Many. And what have they achieved? Nothing'. Some interviewees were also critical of the government for other reasons: 'They do it to get along with the international community, to receive money, but they know that if they do something against the population, it will turn against them'. This is even more the case given the political and military conflict in Casamance, in which whatever comes from the north is always seen as an aggression against local sentiment and interests. Many interviewees complained that the Senegalese administration should not interfere in local issues in Casamance. Another informant, a Gambian from Thionck-Essyl, provided another view: 'No government will pursue excision if people link this practice to Islam'.

This has to do with a recurring notion in the region that the administration is foreign. Indeed, in some Joola dialects, the Senegalese government is even referred to as *Alulumayi*, 'the white people' (referring to the skin colour of the French colonizers), which etymologically means 'the curious, those who are always asking'. The same people who work in the administration, if they are not members of an indigenous lineage, are also considered to be foreigners and representatives of the *Alulumayi*, even if they are actually from the same ethnic group (Tomàs 2005a). In a focus group held with the staff of a hospital, one professional said: 'I am also Joola, but I am not Joola from here. As a midwife, I can to a certain degree make comments about excision to women, but I cannot say that I am fundamentally opposed to it. Then I go out and meet them in the street, in the market...' Another person added: 'And besides ... there is the subject of witchcraft ... They can place a spell on us ... The women here are very powerful. Their mystical power is very powerful'. The relationship between the women who are considered most powerful – as they are the initiators – and the workers in the administration is complex. People often look the other way or even give support

to the local way of doing things, as is clear from these words of an initiator from the Diouloulou area: ‘I am considered a great lady. I do not have to ask permission from anyone. I do not ask permission to perform excision because it is prohibited. I only ask permission to do the great initiation, the *Ñakaba*. For the last initiation, the *Ñakaba* of 2017, I asked permission from the mayor, the prefect and the head of the brigade. Everyone gave me permission, and they attended on the day of the party to watch the initiates dance’.

### *The role of NGOs*

Large-scale funding for awareness-raising initiatives obtained through international cooperation has been mobilized to support the implementation of the Senegalese legislation against FGM/C. For more than twenty years numerous local and international NGOs have been working on the issue in the area, such as Enda-ACAS, the Red Cross, Save the Children, Siggil Jiggen and Tostan, sometimes in collaboration with the Senegalese government or with different aid agencies. Awareness campaigns have been carried out using several methodologies, not without some difficulties when working with communities. Enda-ACAS, for example, launched a program in 2014-2015 to intervene in families, provide medical and legal support to women who had undergone excision, and promote the dissemination of information among young women, health professionals and field workers. As one of these workers explained, this was done as follows:

When we went to the villages to raise awareness about the violence against women and children, people listened with a degree of interest until we came to the issue of mutilation. At that point, there were always women who stood up very angry, saying that we could not talk about this issue, as it is a women's issue, and they left. In some cases there were also women who stayed to listen, and even some excisers, who, as they had come to understand the consequences, decided to abandon the practice. Indeed, two or three of these women later even campaigned with us.

The same person recalled, ‘We used mannequins to raise awareness, to show them the parts of the body and the female genitalia. This scandalized some of the older ladies present’. Another woman, who worked for another NGO, provided an opposite example: ‘One day I spoke with an excision practitioner, a woman from Ziguinchor, and she told me, “I do not care how much I get done by the law – I will spend three months in prison, and when I get out, I will continue with my endeavours”.’ Another informant said that an exciser can currently charge about 1,500 CFA and can perform hundreds of interventions per year. ‘Although they do not live off that, at the end of the year it is a very good added benefit’.

Some NGOs, such as the Senegalese Siggil Jigéen, founded in 1995, have recently focused their work on changing the mentality of the initiators. One worker told us of the difficulties that they encountered:

We try to raise awareness with the circumcisers. It was difficult for them to listen at the beginning. Even when they say 'Yes', they see that this can harm women, and they will not do it anymore... How can you know that they have indeed forsaken the practice? Due to the law the excisers have removed themselves from public view, yet they continue to perform the practice in secret. They have prestige and power within the community, and they fulfil a very important role beyond FGM/C.

One Bainunk woman who campaigns against the practice told us that 'the *angaman* (excisers) are considered to be people with special powers, who heal, cure many things ... When I was little, we came here, all the girls, and they made us bathe to purify us. I remember it perfectly. (...) Also, they are people who have dreams, and through those dreams they guide society. They are highly respected by everyone'. In addition, according to several testimonies, it is because they deal with the sexual health of many of the girls in their society.

A number of women who were interviewed and who work in NGOs to spread awareness about the issue proclaimed their commitment by saying that 'the fight against excision is my fight!' One of them works for the Santa Yalla association, based in Ziguinchor. Although they do not have specific projects relating to FGM/C, they take advantage of visits regarding other issues to raise awareness about its consequences. The process is summarized as follows:

They performed an excision on me. But the direct experience that I had and the information that I have received has convinced me that it is a practice that should be abandoned. In 1957, in my town, they cut fifteen women all at the same time. None of them has been able to have children. In my opinion, although I do not know for sure, this is because of excision. I had four sons and six daughters, and I have not performed excision on any of them. Now I work to raise awareness among young people. I think they are the ones who can change the mentality of ... their daughters. Yes, this is going to last for a while. When I go through the villages I seek out the young girls because the older girls do not listen to me.

Other NGOs have adopted different approaches to communication in order to mobilize women to abandon FGM/C, like collaborations with local singers to raise awareness through music (e.g. Sister Fa, Coumba Gawlo, Mama Sadio). Comics have also been published, such as *Le Choix de Bintou*, an initiative of the NGO Enda-Tiers Monde, in collaboration with the Free Clinic and the Belgian cooperation sector in Dakar, as well as documentaries, such as *L'appel de Diegoune* (2008), produced by Tostan and disseminated in more than a hundred towns in the area, as well as to Joola immigrants living in France, Italy, Spain and Switzerland (UNICEF-Innocenti 2010).

Of all the NGOs, Tostan's work on FGM/C has drawn the greatest attention internationally. Active in Casamance since 2001, the Community Empowerment Program (CEP) launched by Tostan (meaning 'breakthrough' in the Wolof language) promotes community-led development using a human rights approach. CEP participants are trained in human rights, health, literacy and the environment, and they spread knowledge through their social networks. Regarding FGM/C, Tostan's model aims to change social norms in communities through women's empowerment, promoting abandonment of the practice through, for example, 'dropping the knife' ceremonies and public declarations.

### **Perpetuation of the practice, changes in the ritual, and the perceptions of men and youths**

#### *The law faced with community pressure: who would denounce their own mother?*

Beyond the perception of the administration among the local population and the role of its workers in situ, as a worker from the Ministry of Education in Ziguinchor said, 'For the law to be applied, it needs someone to report the facts'. In all our interviews, we only encountered five people who stated that if they knew of a case they would report it. The rest stated that nobody has an interest in denouncing others. A teacher from a school in Oussouye explained:

A few months ago, a mother asked to leave with her daughter (...) for two or three days. In the end she spent more than ten days away. When she came back I asked her what had happened. (...) She had taken the two-year-old girl to her hometown in Guinea Conakry to have FGM/C performed on her. I told her that this was not right, that she could harm her daughter, but I did not report her. If I did, not only would I turn her family against her, the whole Pehl community would come down on me.

Two professors from a Ziguinchor institute and several health-centre workers provided a similar opinion.

According to some informants, neighbours often know that a girl has just been cut. 'You only need to observe the girls: you can see how they walk', said a woman from Ziguinchor. Despite this, several interviewees say that 'nobody will report a neighbour, even if he sees a girl like that, not even if he has heard or seen her from his patio: the culture of denunciation does not exist here, and even less so between different ethnic groups'.

On the other hand, we found several men who claimed to have told their wives and mothers that if they took their daughter to town to practise excision, they would denounce them without hesitation. Some men said they were against FGM/C but confessed to not trusting their family environment. A Manding resident in a town near Kafountine, who thought his family wanted to take his daughter for FGM/C, said: 'I (...) said to my mother: "Mother, I love you very much, I know that you have brought me into the world, and I respect you very much, but do not ask me to do this

to my daughter, because I will not do it. And if you do it to yourself, I will report you and the circumciser”.’ Other men have tried similar strategies, not always successfully, as a Joola from the Tenduck area, who works in the administration in Ziguinchor, told us: ‘During the summer holidays my mother went to the village and cut my daughter. I didn’t denounce her. Who would denounce her mother?’

#### *Limited effectiveness of awareness-raising initiatives*

After twenty years of campaigning in local communities for FGM/C to be abandoned, the slow decline in the prevalence rate illustrates the limited impact of these programs. The results seem less effective than what is reported in institutional documents and by international aid agencies. A report prepared by the Senegalese government in 2010 noted: ‘The action of civil-society organizations has prompted the mobilization of communities to promote the abandonment of excision. Despite this, this mobilization does not at all mean that these communities have genuinely subscribed to the declarations of abandonment, something that one is not allowed to talk about in the context of progress in the fight against FGM/C’ (Ministère Chargé de la Famille 2010: 10). In an interview, an NGO executive said: ‘Our work has changed the mentality of many people, and although maybe we cannot say that abandonment of excision has taken hold in all the towns where we have worked, there has nonetheless been a change of sorts’. Ultimately, in this view, the responsibility for what happens in this country is not the NGOs’ but rather the Senegalese government’s: ‘We have done our part’.

Opinion about NGOs’ work and sensitization initiatives varies among interviewees. While in some cases women and men collaborate with NGOs in raising awareness of the consequences of the practice, others do not trust NGOs at all, especially if the task is being carried out by people from the north of the country. Moreover, most of the time it is seen as a way of obtaining money. The notion that people have to go and listen to the NGO workers or to members of the government, but that then they must revert to following society’s own norms, is commonplace. A high-school teacher, a Joola married to a Pehl woman, said: ‘My wife says that when NGOs come to the village to campaign against excision among women, they all go, listen and eat, then go home and continue practising it’.

#### *Changes in the ritual*

Thus, the law prohibiting excision and the awareness-raising campaigns have not led to FGM/C being abandoned. Nonetheless many interviewees were clear that the law has resulted in substantial changes to the initiation ritual in respect of its public nature and the timing of the ritual’s three

phases. Many actions are now carried out in secret in order to avoid the consequences of the prohibition.

First, the age at which FGM/C is practised has been significantly reduced. Indeed, according to many testimonies, nowadays girls undergo the practice before they reach one year of age. However, several excisers explained that there has never been a stipulated age for excision. Moreover, there are virtually no written sources that mention excision taking place in Basse-Casamance before four or five years of age. According to Zaborowski (1894), in the late nineteenth century excision was performed between the ages of ten and sixteen. Reveyrand-Coulon (1982) reported that among the Manding the age was between five and ten, among the Joola Foogny between seven and fourteen, among the Pehl Fouta (in northern Senegal) between seven and ten, and among the Pehl from Fouladou (in Haute-Casamance) just a few months old. Trincaz (1981) pointed out that in Ziguinchor excision was practised between five and fifteen years of age, depending on the family's finances and the village schedule. A study by Mottin-Sylla (1990) underlined that, at the end of the 1980s, 75% of the Joola practisers performed it between four and nine years of age.

Secondly, excision now occurs clandestinely. The following report of June 1974 from Ziguinchor illustrates the public nature of the practice before the law against was introduced:

Sixty young girls from five to fifteen years of age (...) walk the streets of Ziguinchor, expressing their happiness... To mark the advent of their new state, they wear beautiful dresses, heads and waists adorned with multicoloured pearls and brightly coloured ribbons, bells in their hands... Their scorn is directed at every woman who still avoids this mutilation, [which is] considered a duty of purification. Nobility, dignity, education and honour – these are the characteristics derived from this solemn process. (cited by Trincaz 1981: 88)

Some women, when they have the support of their husbands, opt to ask the exciser to come to their homes to perform it right there. Recovery from the operation, which in younger girls is faster, also takes place at home, where the girls remain confined until they are healed. Sometimes families gather three or four girls and do it together. Other women, especially those whose husbands are against it, choose to take the girls to the home of the exciser, perhaps in a major city like Bignona or Ziguinchor, or in their village of origin. Some girls undergo the procedure outside the country's borders, in Gambia, Guinea Bissau or Guinea Conakry, a new tendency known as 'cross-border FGM/C' (Shell-Duncan et al. 2013). 'There are fathers who do not know that their daughters have been cut ... The mother one day takes the girl for months, saying she is going to see a relative or whatever. They cut the child, they return in a few days, and if the girl is well, the father does not find out. Fathers are not going to examine the private parts of their young daughters to see if there is any scarring every time the mother takes off with her', said an educator from Ziguinchor. Many

testimonies also stated that, if something goes wrong during the excision, nobody will take the girl to the hospital for fear of being reported.

Thirdly, the rite of initiation has also changed, still occurring in public, but in adolescence. Some oral sources indicated that excision and initiation were formerly performed at the same time, although others claimed that the two procedures could be done at different times. The ritual included a period in which the girls were secluded in the forest, which could last two months or more.<sup>8</sup> Two Manding initiators from Ziguinchor described a ritual that occurred before the end of the 1990s, showing how the law has tarnished their public reputations:

- It was a great success when no girl became ill. That's why we celebrated it too. It used to be performed every other year...

- Both excision and initiation?

- Yes. Girls ... from ten years of age and older would enter. There could be fifty girls, even a hundred or more ... At that time, all these houses (she pointed behind her house) did not exist; here, there was a forest. The initiation was performed in an enclosure made out of palm leaves, and during the day the girls went out into the forest. It was done in May. They could spend a month or more here.

-And were they Manding girls?

-Yes, Manding, Joola, Fula, Bainunk ... all of the same tradition.

- All together?

-Yes, all together (...) It was a great ceremony. All the people in the neighbourhood came to watch them dance. The government gave us rice. Back then there was a lot of rice and a lot of peace. (...) The girls learned how to behave in front of an adult, how to eat in front of an adult, how to interpret the looks and gestures of their mothers when there were people in front of them, health things ... and also how to take care of children. (...) Then the ban came, and we lost our names.

- Your names?

- Yes, their names [says our friend and translator] to honour them. Before an initiator was told *Ñi mu musóo leti!* (This is a woman!)

Now initiation takes much less time. All the girls of the village who have undergone FGM/C over the years in different places and at different ages are gathered together for a short period, even just a weekend, and they have a celebration. A young Joola Buluf from the department of Bignona described her excision in the late 1990s and her initiation ten years later as follows:

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<sup>8</sup> See Van Gennep's classic description (1909), including the three phases of the rites of passage: separation, liminality and incorporation.

They excised me when I was six or seven years old. At the time I was living in Oussouye. We were about twenty girls, all mixed: Joola, Pehl and Manding. We were at home; we lived as a family, as if we were sisters. We shared everything. We used to play... We were happy. I met new people. (...) And we learned songs ... I do not know how long we were there for ... A few days, not many. When we left, our families were waiting for us. (...). The initiation was performed in a village of the Buluf. It was 2010. And we were all Joola. There were girls who were four or five years old, and also girls who were older than I. We did it during the rainy season. We entered on a Saturday, in an enclosure built for the occasion. But at night we went to sleep at the foyer. The next day, Sunday, we returned to the venue and went out to dance and do everything that needed to be done. We went with braids, very beautiful, to dance. Then there was a party for three or four days. But we each slept each in our (own) house. We danced around the neighbourhoods ... around the neighbourhoods that had our same tradition.

If there are girls who were not cut when they were young, and they want to be initiated, they undergo the procedure before entering the bush. That was the case for an eighteen-year-old girl who had been born in a family opposed to excision. When, in 2017, it was time to do the initiation in her home town, in order not to be excluded from her generational group she decided to attend and, against the wishes of her father and mother, asked to undergo excision.

#### *Inter-ethnic and intergenerational tensions around the practice of FGM/C*

Within the context of mixed marriages, traditions may become a source of identity conflict. While traditional norms dictate that the daughters of a mixed marriage should follow the tradition of their paternal lineages, women are often subject to criticism or even reprisals for not practising the tradition of the lineage into which they have married. Thus, for example, among the Joola Huluf of the Kingdom of Oussouye, where the traditional religion strictly forbids the practice of excision, King Sibilumbay, extremely loved and respected by the local Joola (Tomàs, 2005b), said: ‘No, no, here this is not practised, it is very serious. If a woman here marries a man there and does this to her daughters she cannot return to the kingdom, and she cannot eat with the women here. No. Neither she nor her daughters. They are impure. You cannot shed blood in our kingdom. No, not at all’.

There is also the opposite case, like that of a particular woman born in the department of Oussouye, where excision is not practised among the Joola Huluf and Esulalu. In the 1990s she married a Joola from Kafountine, where excision is practised. She said that while they were living in Elinkin everything went relatively well, and she would only get comments when she was visiting Kafountine. When she finally went to live at her husband's house, however, the pressure increased terribly:

The women in my husband's family kept insisting and insisting that I do the *eñakai* (excision). That I was impure, that I was dirty, that I was this and that and many other things. They began to shun me. I could not eat with them. They did not eat the food that I

cooked. Uhhh! They also did not help me in the field, with rice. I was alone, very alone. I had no help from anyone. At first my husband provided me with a degree of support, but in the end he did not. (...) And I went to live with a nephew in another village. (...) They did it to my daughters... It's up to him; he's their father.

Excision also creates intergenerational tensions, embodying the inherent conflict between 'tradition' and 'modernity' in these communities. An old Manding woman who underwent excision sometime around 1950 said: 'We did it to be more educated, to know what it is to be a woman, to know how to dress and avoid men, to know how to have children and know how to take care of them. Nowadays, as they do not do it, they are ruder, they do not know anything, and, in addition, they divorce immediately because they do not know what it is to be a woman. Initiation was life!'

Women also tend to call into question the traditional view of the acceptance of pain, and whether pain can be expressed publicly or not. During the interviews, some women in favour of excision explained that they changed their minds when a midwife or gynaecologist told them that the health problems they had experienced were caused by the excision. Some of them say: 'Well, if that's the case, I will not do this to my daughters'. Nonetheless, in case of doubt, the younger generations refer to their elders. That was the case for a twenty-year-old Joola, mother of a baby girl, who said she did not know whether she should take her daughter to initiation and that she would ask her mother for advice.

### *Reasons for perpetuating the practice*

The reasons why this practice is still being performed are many and varied. Some women link it to Islam, others to the control of female sexuality, although some men have completely opposite beliefs: 'The girls who have undergone excision have more sexual relations because now they know what an orgasm is, and they try to get it with many men'. But the most recurrent explanation by far is that offered by Dellenborg (2009), of the 'two forms of citizenship': while one form of citizenship is linked to the Senegalese state, the other integrates the people into the local community. It is in the setting of this second sense of citizenship that FMG/C comes into play.

Many women argued that excision is important for acceptance among adult women. Some highlighted the power of participation and decision: 'Those who are not initiated cannot enter the places where meetings are held in which women decide the most important things'. Others referred to the fear of being marginalized and being called *solimaa* or impure.<sup>9</sup> One woman from Bignona said that 'a woman told me that, if she did not do it to her daughter, not only would she, or her

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<sup>9</sup> *Solimaa* means 'impure' and is also used of 'uncircumcised men. By extension, it also means dirty, immature, uncultured'. It is believed that, through their impurity, those classed as *solimaa* contaminate food. They are therefore excluded from the food chain, which circumcised women are in charge of (Kaplan et al. 2013b).

daughter, be excluded, but also her entire family.' This same fear of being marginalized is what led an older woman who was convinced that excision is dangerous not to speak out against it to the women of her generation and instead to pretend that she was in favour of it.

Among the arguments that the practice should be continued was the link between excision and the power of women and motherhood. A circumciser from the Diouloulou area told us:

I cannot tell you the most important thing for which excision should be done: it's a secret. But I can tell you that the moment of knowing the secret linked to excision is the moment of delivery. When a girl is young she does not know, she does not understand why excision has been practised. No. (...) Everything is explained just before the birth, not before (that). The mother who accompanies her daughter to give birth says: 'What they did to you as a child has to do with what will happen to you now'. That day they listen because it hurts them and they are attentive. (...) . It is very important to have excision performed before delivery, but not the initiation. If the initiation has not been done, nothing happens. (...). Formerly, if a woman was going to give birth and had not had excision, they would do it to her before giving birth, at the time of delivery. Because thanks to excision, she is also taught to be a mother.

*'It's a women's thing'... and what do men say?*

Another crucial question is who decides that excision should be performed. The vast majority of people, whether men or women, young or old, Manding or Joola, had a clear opinion about this: 'Excision is a women's issue'. Indeed, many young people consider that the decision whether or not to make a girl undergo FGM/C lies with the women (i.e., the mother, aunts, maternal and especially paternal grandmothers and female religious leaders). As already underlined in this article (and as many authors have already pointed out: see Linares 1992, Dellenborg 1996), there is a generalized perception that issues related to women's sexuality and motherhood are 'women's affairs'. This is especially so in the case of excision, which, according to many sources, is 'the great secret subject of women'. Among the students we surveyed, fewer than 10% said that the father also has the power to make decisions in this regard, and only three out of 130 individuals we surveyed said that it is only the father who has the final say. Although there have been some declarations by imams in Senegal against excision, several Muslim leaders in Casamance also consider it to be a women's issue. One of them refused to make a public statement against excision because doing so 'would be an insult to all the women here'.

We also found that some men said that they wanted to participate in the education of their daughters, but felt that the women of the family would not allow them to intervene, often being told by their wives or mothers something like: 'You take care of the initiation of the boys; I will do so for the girls. Mind your own business'.

As we saw earlier, some do decide to intervene despite being told not to. In some cases, this attitude arose as a result of difficulties in sexual relations between the partners: ‘I do not want my daughter to suffer like my wife when we have sex’, said a Pehl man resident in Bignona.

### *Youths, excision and initiation*

One of the key points of the research was to determine young people’s opinions on this issue. What do they know about the law? What positive and negative aspects does the practice have for them? What do they think about initiation? Will they have their daughters undergo excision?

The student survey results do not show any clear position regarding FGM/C on the part of young people. Answers indicate their deep attachment to their culture, which, however, brings them into a situation of cleavage between tradition and their knowledge of the harmfulness of the practice. The vast majority of the students who participated in the survey, who were between fifteen and twenty-five years old and who overwhelmingly declared themselves to be Muslims, said they were not aware that there is a law in Senegal banning FGM/C.

Also, most of our younger interlocutors considered excision necessary for initiation and felt that both are essential in order to learn their own culture. A girl from Thionck Essyl said that ‘initiation has many positive aspects. Among them, we can cite education: because the family alone cannot educate all boys and girls, we have to take them to the sacred forest’. While most subscribed to the notion that initiation is crucial to knowing one’s own culture, there was a gap in respect of the degree of knowledge about FGM/C and a remarkable difference in opinions. A few students argued that it was important to be a good Muslim. Others argued that the practice served to prevent sexual relations outside marriage. Some said that FGM/C must be carried out in order to have children, while others said this was not the case. Some, a definite minority, defined excision as ‘cutting out the useless part of the private parts’. Some girls linked excision with motherhood, as did a circumciser from Diouloulou. A Joola Buluf girl said very clearly: ‘Excision allows us to have children, and initiation allows us to have the right to speak in society’.

Many of the students linked excision and initiation with enjoying greater freedom, entering adulthood and gaining knowledge. A boy from Sindian said: ‘She will be a girl who will have the right to marry, she will have freedom compared to her time before excision; she will have the right to speak according to the contexts’. Some students referred to physical resistance to men: ‘Excision often allows girls to turn down their partners or a boy making advances’. Others said that excision would allow them to enjoy good health.

Among the negative aspects of FGM/C, fewer than 10% of the students accepted that excision can cause health problems. The ensuing complications mentioned were bleeding, transmission of

disease, difficulties in childbirth and an inability to have children. Others identified the negative aspects of initiation as being related to financial considerations: ‘Why spend so much on an initiation?’ There were also some who criticized both procedures, dismissing them as pagan practices.

When we asked if they would have their own daughters undergo excision or initiation in the future, we encountered a wide range of answers from these young people. Most of those who would take their daughters to undergo the procedure argued that both excision and initiation are necessary to know one's culture and to be able to distinguish good from evil. A boy from Diouloulou, after saying that medicine states that (excision) causes problems in the cervix and that initiation is a financial burden because it involves a great deal of expense, said that he will take his daughters to excision ‘out of a sense of obedience, respect and courage, as well as because all of our ancestors underwent it, and we too must show our daughters the culture of our grandmothers’.

Others revealed their doubts, such as a boy who went to school in Thionck-Essyl, who said: ‘On the one hand, I'm going to try not to let our Joola culture become lost. On the other hand, we need to acknowledge that the world moves on without it (excision) ...’ He himself, answering the question of whether he would take his daughters to undergo initiation, wrote: ‘I am afraid of women’. Others expressed more pragmatic doubts. A girl with a Joola father and a Pehl mother put forward these very enlightening arguments, which link personal values with marriage alliances, gender roles, social conventions and the obligations of patrilineality:

As far as I am concerned I will never take my daughters to undergo initiation because it is said that, before performing initiation, excision must be carried out. And this I will never do to my future daughters. I have answered that I do not know what I will do because I do not know who the future father of my daughters will be. For example, if the future father of my daughters decides to adhere to this custom, in this case we will have many problems in the family, and then the women will say that the wife does not have respect for her husband.

Among those who answered that they would not perform excision the reasons were diverse, being linked to health, religion or sexuality. One young woman said: ‘I will not take my daughters to undergo excision because it is a dangerous practice, because it takes away a part of the woman that allows her to have pleasure when she makes love’. Some supported their opposition by describing their own experiences, such as this Joola Fogany girl: ‘I will not take her to follow in this practice. I am a victim of this and I suffer a lot, and I do not want my daughters to suffer like me. Excision is bad, and it leads to bad outcomes’. Some students made it very clear that, despite the criticism of the other women, who call them *solimaa* (impure, dirty), they will not take their

daughters to undergo excision. Only two students out of the 130 we surveyed referred to the law as a reason not to take their daughters to undergo excision.

## **Conclusion**

Although in recent decades the work of the government and numerous NGOs in raising awareness about the practice has influenced some sectors of society, all the available statistical information suggests that the prevalence of excision has declined only slightly. This is corroborated by our ethnographic work in Basse-Casamance. Some women and men have changed their minds, having been made aware of the various issues or as a result of their personal experiences, and even some excisers have stopped performing the procedure. But many others continue to view excision and initiation as essential if one is to be included in the local community as a woman with full rights. To avoid prosecution by the law the ritual stages have been changed, excision being practised at a very early age. On the one hand, this highlights the crucial role of women in affirming ethnic and gender identities through perpetuation of the practise. On the other hand, the lack of confidence of the local population in government policies and, by extension, in the government itself, as well as in the NGOs involved, compared with the strong influence of the traditional society, allows and at the same time requires participation in an organization and an operation that women especially perceive as being more necessary, more useful and more relevant.

Despite this, it is evident that the current practice of excision in Basse-Casamance, faced with a law that prohibits it, and coupled with the relative impact of raising awareness about the issue, the different values that are taking hold in the younger generations and considerations regarding marriage alliances, which often unite two different traditions, are creating a series of debates and tensions locally in many parts of the region (as happens with other practices, whether traditional or not). These tensions take place at the heart of marriage, family, women's associations, age groups, peoples and communities, as well as within the administration. They all generate actions and reactions, proclamations and silence, agreements and differences, inclusions and various exclusions, depending on the context and even the person. In many cases, men and women try to strike a balance between the roles expected of them in a particular context, their personal experiences and opinions, and the opportunities offered by this situation (personal, family, social, medical, etc.). In short, although in local perceptions there is a clear trend towards excision continuing as a crucial element in the lives of many women, it is no less true that the voices in the region are becoming more diverse every day.

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THE CLASS-ORIENTED INHERITANCE OF ETHNICITY:  
ANALYSIS OF THE SYMBOLIC CAPITAL OF JAPANESE-NESS AMONG JAPANESE  
BRAZILIANS IN RECIFE AND IVOTI

YURA YOKOYAMA<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract.** The early experiences of immigrants may create different trajectories for the ethnicities of their descendants. Second-generation Japanese Brazilians in Recife and Ivoti express their ethnic subjectivity on a different individual basis: some emphasize Brazilian-ness, while others highlight Japanese-ness. The difference lies in whether memories of the early experiences of their families give them an incentive to inherit Japanese-ness in order to make sense of their current class situations and the transitions in their lives. By dealing with three different individual narratives of second-generation Japanese descendants I recorded in Brazil, this article aims to shed light on the occurrence of class-oriented ethnic divisions within the ethnic subjectivities of the descendants of Japanese migrants in Brazil.

**Keywords:** Brazil, immigration, ethnicity, symbolic capital, class, divided ethnic subjectivity, ancestry.

## Introduction

I think that they (the first generations) are warriors, heroes, and they are very brave and persevering. They dedicated their lives to investing in their children`s better futures, especially in their education. They worked until late at night and woke up early for work the next day. There was no Sunday, holiday or vacation for them. My parents strove so hard to enhance the productivity of their work in order to reduce labour. (Kiyoko:<sup>2</sup> *Nisei*<sup>3</sup>)

The above quote is from one of my informants, Kiyoko, who lives in the *colônia japonesa* (Japanese settlement) in the town of Ivoti in the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. Kiyoko is a second-generation descendant of Japanese immigrants to Brazil. While in academia they are called Japanese Brazilians,<sup>4</sup> in Brazil they are simply called *japonês*

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<sup>1</sup> MSc student in Japanese Studies in the School of Interdisciplinary Area Studies, University of Oxford, with a concentration on the anthropology of Japan. Email address: yura.yokoyama@sant.ox.ac.uk

<sup>2</sup> All names have been anonymized in this paper.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Second generation’ in Japanese. The word *Issei*, used later, means ‘first generation’.

<sup>4</sup> There are approximately 1.5 million people of Japanese origin in Brazil. Japanese immigration started in 1908

(Japanese). Kiyoko told me how she thinks about her parents, who are from the first generation of migrants. What I elicited from her statement was full of appreciation and respect for her parents, who had overcome economic struggles and social discrimination in this new land on the opposite side of the world from Japan. For Kiyoko, what her parents did was to invest generously in their children for the sake of the latter's better futures by sacrificing their own desires and achievements.

I met Kiyoko during a period of socio-economic crisis in Brazil,<sup>5</sup> when a mood of depression hung over the entire country. During my fieldwork<sup>6</sup> the price of petrol rose, after which people working in the transportation sector launched a major strike causing the sector to stop running for a time. The impact of the crisis was also obvious from the many homeless people on the streets, the broken buildings and roads, the many *favelas* (shanty town) along the river, the fall in the Brazilian currency, which benefited foreigners like myself, and people's resentments and anxieties about the next presidential election in October. However, when I asked Kiyoko about the potential impact of the crisis on her life, contrary to my expectations she started to explain how the first generation of migrants had improved her life, which had not been affected by the crisis, thanks to the upward class mobility her parents had already achieved. She thought the crisis was affecting those in economic difficulties, there being much less impact, if any, on those around her. She felt that there were no problems in her life, for which she had her parents to thank.

This article aims to elucidate a peculiar phenomenon I observed during my fieldwork in Brazil. Specifically focusing on the second generation of Japanese Brazilians, my fieldwork asked how Japanese ethnicity is generated and inherited by the initial migrants'

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under a government immigration programme.

<sup>5</sup> Brazil has been suffering a socio-financial crisis since 2014 (see Barua 2016; Costa et al. 2017; Xuecan 2017; Child and Simos 2018; Reuters 2018). In 2015 GDP fell by 3.9% and the following year it recorded a 3.6% drop, breaking a record established in 1931. The unemployment rate also rose to 8.5%, rising further to 12% in 2016.

<sup>6</sup> The fieldwork was conducted in Recife and Ivoti from June to August in 2018, thanks to generous funding from the US National Science Foundation and the Brazilian Studies Association.

descendants, those who were born in Brazil. In other words, I was particularly interested in how the descendants of Japanese immigrants become Japanese in Brazil. One result of my enquiry was that the more socially successful the first generation is considered to be by their descendants, the more the latter tend to identify with a Japanese ethnicity. In this context, I suggest that Japanese ethnic subjectivity in the second generation may be contingent on their class subjectivities, which have been formed by the experiences of the prior generation of migrants and their own interpretations of and reflections on the impact of those experiences on their current class status.

In doing fieldwork in Recife and Ivoti, I was able to observe the on-going ethnic transition from the first to the second generation, which shows how Japanese-ness is generated, inherited and intensified in respect of Japanese ethnic subjectivity and how the class status of the descendants of the original migrants is deeply intertwined with this process. In addition, I argue that the financial crisis has encouraged many Japanese Brazilians to rethink their current class status, asking themselves why they have not been affected by it, even though many others are suffering seriously from the crisis. In the following sections, after offering basic historical understandings of the early migrant experiences of Japanese immigrants in the literature on Japanese Brazilians, I draw in the individual narratives I recorded to describe the family backgrounds of the first generation of immigrants and the second generation's interpretations of them. From a consideration of these aspects, the discussion moves to the question of the inheritance and maintenance of class-oriented ethnic identity by the original migrants' descendants.

### **Pioneers in the new land**

It is already over a hundred years since the earliest Japanese immigrants arrived in Brazil. After completing a journey of almost two months by ship, around 781 Japanese immigrants

successfully migrated to Brazil in 1908. At the beginning they had to engage in hard work on coffee plantations in and around the state of São Paulo. Experiencing and resisting the quasi-slavery-like treatment of the *fazendeiros* (coffee plantation owners) and racism from Brazilian white nativists against themselves as a ‘yellow’ race (Lesser 1999), early immigrants from Japan, especially the first generation, experienced severe economic conditions as unskilled labour migrants. As Harada (2008) argues, the period from 1908 to 1942 was a time of adjustment and of resistance to these conditions.

The flow of Japanese immigrants temporarily stopped after Japan’s defeat in World War II. However, after diplomatic relations between Japan and Brazil were reinstated in 1951, Japanese immigration resumed. Although some scholarly works vividly describe the harsh experiences of the early pre-war immigrants (Normano 1934; Holloway 1980; Tsuchida 1998; Lesser 1999; Lesser 2003; Carvalho 2003; Nishida 2017), there is little discussion in this literature of the early experiences of post-war Japanese immigrants. Aiming to fill this gap, this article also posits that the experiences and economic conditions of post-war immigrants were just as severe as those of their pre-war forbears given the consistent tendency to engage in unskilled agricultural work in the beginning. The narratives I introduce below focus on the memories of post-war immigrants in Japanese Brazilian communities outside São Paulo.<sup>7</sup> As some of the local literature about Japanese immigrants in Recife and Ivoti shows, experiences could be challenging given that Japanese immigrants had to settle in localities where they were scarcely accorded any social recognition (Motta 2011; Santos et al 2003; Gaudioso and Soares 2017).

Japanese immigrants started to migrate internally to Recife and Ivoti from the 1960s. Although the reasons underlying this migration are quite diverse in the case of Recife, those who went to Ivoti almost all moved as agricultural migrants, having been allocated land by

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<sup>7</sup> São Paulo attracts a great deal of attention from scholarship in this area because it hosts the largest Japanese Brazilian community, called Liberdade, which accommodates a large proportion of the Japanese population in Brazil.

the state government of Rio Grande do Sul. Even though Japanese immigrants and their descendants live dispersed throughout the city of Recife, where they follow different businesses, in Ivoti many of them live collectively a district called the *colônia japonesa* (Japanese settlement). In Ivoti, where I visited the local Japanese association, there is a memorial, *Memorial da Colônia Japonesa*,<sup>8</sup> depicting the harshness of agricultural activities and the austere lives of the early immigrants. Teruko, a vice-president of the memorial, explained, ‘We have this memorial so as not to forget the experiences of our grandparents and parents’.

In Recife, on the other hand, the Associação Cultural Japonesa do Recife<sup>9</sup> (Japanese Cultural Association of Recife or ACRJ), a cultural institution of Japanese Brazilians I frequently visited in order to conduct interviews, was established in order to create solidarity among Japanese Brazilians working in Recife through cultural activities, food events and festivals. In ACRJ I met some first-generation immigrants who repeatedly and consistently recalled the socio-economic struggles they had to go through in the early stages of immigration. One of the families I interviewed, which owns a few restaurants in the city, mentioned that at first they started farming with just a few chickens and only turned to their restaurant business later. They also pointed out that Japanese food did not have a good reputation in the city at the time. In this context, based on the premise that the early experiences of the post-war immigrants were also bitter, in the following section the memories and interpretations of the second-generation migrants about their own early experiences as immigrants are described in relation to how Japanese-ness comes into being as part of the dynamics of changing class status within their ethnic subjectivity.

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<sup>8</sup> The memorial is located within the Japanese area of settlement, and a Japanese Brazilian staff member welcomes visitors.

<sup>9</sup> This Association is a hub for Japanese Brazilians living in the city. Established for the religious purposes of Tenrikyo, one of Japan’s minor religions, it was transformed into a cultural association later on.

### **Struggles: memories of the first generation's immigrant experiences**

My family was very poor at the beginning. My parents were farming in the countryside, and we lived in a house without light. Of course, there was no money for the children's education, so I went to an almost free state school and could not go to university. I think we (the first generation) share the feeling that we want our children to live better lives. This is why we try to invest as much as possible in their education. (Yoshiko: *Issei*)

'My family had no light', recalled Yoshiko, in contrast to her current situation. I interviewed her with her husband Hiroshi in a fancy condominium located in Boa Viagem, one of the most expensive neighbourhoods in Recife. From the room, I could see the beautiful ocean shining through the window. Yoshiko met Hiroshi when she was in her twenties, married him and raised two sons, Ricardo and Lucas. She migrated to Brazil with her parents when she was twelve years old. Her father first brought his family to a Japanese settlement in Natal<sup>10</sup> to search for land for farming. Since her family's financial situation did not allow her go to university, she decided to go to the city of Recife in order to find a job. Her husband Hiroshi, conversely, migrated to Brazil when he was 21 years old as a so-called 'technical migrant'.<sup>11</sup> Not being the eldest son in his family enabled him to take that decision, he told me. However, he stated that being a technical migrant does not guarantee one a high salary, while his being Japanese also made him a target of racism in the new land due to the linguistic barrier and his distinctly Asian appearance.

Their younger son Ricardo, who did his doctoral research at the University of Cambridge and is now a professor of computer science at a prestigious local university in Recife, thinks of himself as having some kind of Japanese heritage in respect of his own ethnic subjectivity. He does not speak any Japanese and does not have a Japanese wife, unlike

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<sup>10</sup> Natal is the capital city of Rio Grande do Norte, neighbouring the state of Pernambuco, whose capital is Recife.

<sup>11</sup> Hiroshi went to Recife in 1968 after graduating from a technical high school in Japan by applying for a job in a factory owned by a Japanese Brazilian in the city. This is called 'technical migration' among Japanese migrants in Recife. It was particularly promoted in the 1960s and 1970s by immigration agencies.

his father. However, as in the case of Kiyoko from Ivoti, mentioned above, what emerged from his discourse was his appreciation of the investment his parents had made in his education. Ricardo mentioned:

When I was a child I had to negotiate with my parents about going to a party with my friends, but I did not need to negotiate with them about buying a book. When I wanted a book they bought it for me without hesitating, even though I think that my family was not so rich at the time. (Ricardo: *Nisei*)

He noted that, if his parents had not invested in his education, he would not be a professor now. When I asked which class he thought he belonged to, he answered without hesitation '*classe alta*' (upper class), thanks to the generous support of his parents. 'I think I belong to the top 5% in Brazil, which is thanks to my parents', he remarked. As a witness to their struggles and their dedication to their children's futures, and being directly influenced by the first generation who were ethnically Japanese, his experiences indicate that many second-generation Japanese Brazilians have positive views of their ethnic subjectivity as Japanese because this has shaped the class status they enjoy today. Material conditions such as living in a Japanese-style house, speaking Japanese and decorating one's house with Japanese traditional artefacts is not sufficient to express Japanese ethnicity. Rather, in this context Japanese ethnic subjectivity constitutes symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1999; Weininger 2005). Japanese ethnic subjectivity, as cultural capital whose power stems from the socio-economic practices of earlier generations, functions as a distinct form of symbolic capital among the descendants of Japanese migrants. In the words of Bourdieu, this involves 'legitimizing theatricalization which always accompanies the exercise of power', which 'extends to all practices and in particular consumption' (Bourdieu, quoted in Weininger 2005: 101). In sum, their Japanese ethnicity is something they seek to honour in order to validate their current class status as a result of the contribution made by earlier generations. The

ethnic meaning of their Japanese-ness is superficial, but as a symbol of their success its ideological function is immense, being a major factor enabling the Brazilian-born descendants of Japanese migrants to be Japanese, at least in a sense.

Another family I met during fieldwork runs three Japanese restaurants in Recife. Being quite popular, their restaurants are located in a congested and busy area of the city and have regular customers who enjoy lunch there every day. Kimiko, the current owner, gave me a brief history of herself and the restaurant. She moved to Recife with her husband in the 1970s. Her husband was a former restaurant owner, but he died almost seventeen years ago, after which her third son Koichi decided to take up his right to run the restaurants. She gave me details about how their restaurant business was developed in Recife:

At first we were not running a Japanese restaurant business. My husband and I were running a restaurant serving Brazilian cuisine for local customers, but it was not doing well, but Brazilian customers knew that we were Japanese, right? So they suggested that we should run a Japanese restaurant, so we kind of decided to do it and opened a small Japanese restaurant which had only a counter inside, but there was no table, so customers had to stand up to eat [laughing]. Seen from the current situation, I think it became successful. (Kimiko: *Issei*)

Her third son, Koichi, who felt he was Japanese as well as Brazilian, stated that he is full of appreciation and respect for his parents for developing the restaurant business. For him, being born in Recife, where there are few Japanese immigrants, and being surrounded by Brazilian friends, his home was a space in which he could experience Japanese-ness. One of the reasons why he was so determined to take over the restaurant business was the example of his father, who ran the restaurants the Japanese way. Koichi is proud of his current socio-economic situation and tries to maintain the Japanese style of management in the restaurants he inherited from his parents, whatever that means to him. He often goes to Japan to update his knowledge and understanding of how traditional Japanese restaurants are run in

Japan. Also, his older brother Toshi runs a small store dealing in Japanese products, mainly fish. Toshi said to me, ‘This is the *jeito japonês* (Japanese way)’. He also visits Japan often for training in how to process fish professionally in the Japanese manner. His store, albeit small, has many regular customers who rely on his technical skills and knowledge when it comes to dealing with fish. He said that he had acquired a reputation for *credibilidade* (credibility), thanks to the *jeito japonês*.

After conducting fieldwork in Rio Grande do Sul, Takeyuki Tsuda suggested that Japanese Brazilians in Brazil enjoy their status as a Japanese minority and made use of it (Tsuda 2000). Both Koichi and Toshi strive to make use of their Japanese ethnic inheritance, which stems from the migratory background of their families. Their symbolic Japanese ethnic heritage induces them to associate with Japanese-ness in whatever way they decide.

However, it is not always the case that symbolic Japanese ethnicity is inherited by Japanese Brazilians, the class situations of earlier generations being significant in this respect. Here I introduce the case of Masao. Unlike the cases described formerly, he does not interpret the immigrant experience of his own family at all positively. Conversely his comparatively negative interpretation of his memories of severe economic hardship functions as a class-oriented factor that allows him to let go of his Japanese-ness. When he was asked about his family’s background, he replied:

In the beginning, everyone in the first generation experienced difficult times, the children too. We always worried about food for tomorrow. I often encountered the situation of there only being one egg in my lunchbox [laughing]. My family moved from place to place to farm and failed many times. At one time our family grew coffee. We cultivated land and planted coffee trees, but they all went bad because of the frost, so we waited for another three years and repeated this process in different places again and again. (Masao: *Nisei*)

As a second-generation immigrant, he witnessed his parent’s difficult times in Brazil. Masao, now in his seventies, was a military officer, joining up in São Paulo when he was seventeen

years old. The main incentive driving him to find a job in the city was the economic struggles his parents were experiencing. He basically identifies himself as Brazilian and as a military officer who has dedicated his entire life to the military for the sake of Brazil. What was significant among his statements was his remark that he thinks he is 100% Brazilian, unlike other Japanese migrant descendants, who tend to answer, 'Eu sou brasileiro e japônes' (I am Brazilian and Japanese). For him, since his family was very poor, he needed to assume complete responsibility for his life, from finding a job to marrying, because he could not expect any financial support from his parents and family, though in fact he married and ended up having three children. About his children, he told me, 'My children are Brazilian too, despite their *aparência japonesa* (Japanese appearance)'; they were born and raised by myself and my wife, who was born in Brazil'.

One day he and other members of his army unit were conducting intensive training. Suddenly his captain shouted, 'Ei, japonês lá!' (Hey, Japanese there!). The captain shouted because he was not holding his gun in the proper manner, but this incident shocked him greatly because he had been called 'Japanese' by the captain. Since his childhood he has been called Japanese by his friends and his co-workers, but every time he is called Japanese it reminds him to think of himself as Brazilian. He explains:

As long as you are born in Brazil you are Brazilian, and I think that's very simple. For me, dividing up the Brazilian people by ethnic origin is ridiculous. Of course, German immigrants think that they are German and Japanese immigrants do similarly sometimes too. But more than that, we are Brazilian because we were born in Brazil. Brazilian people have to cooperate. (Masao: *Nisei*)

The notion of *jus soli* seems deeply rooted in his discourse, though his migratory background, where he had to be almost totally independent of his Japanese parents and had to establish a life of his own, matters more in respect of his ethnic subjectivity as a Brazilian. His attitude toward Japanese-ness is quite different from the ethnic discourses of Ricardo and Koichi. In contrast to them, what Masao articulated was the multiculturalism of different ethnic groups

in Brazil as a country of immigrants and Brazilian ethnicity, this being the identity of all those who have been born in Brazil. Nor did he try to impose Japanese ethnicity on his children, but instead raised them as Brazilian. Even though he experienced racism from his colleagues and his commander, he still views himself as Brazilian and thinks that the Brazilian military saved him by giving him a job.

**Concluding remarks: the hard times have gone, but ethnicity is split**

Three different narratives deal with Japanese-ness in different ways because of their different backgrounds. Masao's family history did not support him in maintaining a Japanese ethnic subjectivity. Rather, he relied on his Brazilian-ness as a different way of leading his everyday life in Brazil, despite being the descendant of Japanese immigrants. Conversely, for him his Brazilian-ness – that is, the extent to which he developed his own life by himself for his family, children and career – becomes a form of symbolic capital, as it is the most reasonable way for him to make sense of his current class status as a military veteran who has dedicated his life to Brazil.

For Ricardo, having had educational and financial support from his parents, there is nothing strange in having Japanese ethnic subjectivity as one of the factors validating his class status. Needless to say, his identity also contains a high degree of Brazilian-ness. However, what is important is that he cannot make sense of his current class status without his Japanese ethnic subjectivity because of the extent to which his parents contributed to his life chances. Japanese-ness is deeply embedded in his life because it created the foundation for his career, and this is where his appreciation of his Japanese parents comes from.

Koichi and his older brother Toshi were close witnesses of how their parents developed their restaurant business by making use of their Japanese-ness in Recife, where there was almost no social recognition of Japanese culture at the time. Even though almost all

their friends, co-workers and relatives are Brazilian, they view themselves as Japanese as well as Brazilian because what they are currently doing and why they are currently doing it is a reflection of their parents' Japanese-oriented business.

By observing all these individual narratives of early immigrant experiences and the interpretations of their descendants, this article has shed light on how ethnicity became altered in the sweeping transition from the first to the second generation, that is, from the immigrants to their Brazilian-born descendants in the new land of Brazil. They all experienced hard times, as reflected in racism, social stratification and economic difficulties, but their individual class statuses, whose origin is embedded in their memories of early immigrant experiences, has created completely different trajectories in which the generation of the descendants expresses its ethnicity.

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COSMOLOGICAL RENEWAL:  
AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF NEW YEAR CELEBRATIONS IN THE  
ANDES AS A RITE OF PASSAGE

DANIEL JARA<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract.** Rites of passage are performed on an individual or community basis in order to make visible a transformation in the status, state or temporality of a person, social group or even the entire cosmos. Such rites, which are related to the periodicity of cosmic time, imply that the universe is governed by long periods (called *pachas* in the Andean context) of stability and short periods of chaos and renovation that have repercussions in human life. Among the most important of these rites are the New Year celebrations. In the Andean case, this rite is constituted by a set of different practices which take the form of the elaboration of *años viejos* (personified Old Years) or the presence of the *viudas de año viejo* (widows of the Old Year), whose transvestism indicates the destruction of Latin American hetero-normal patterns. During this night, there is an explicit desire to destroy everything that gives order to the cosmos in order to renew it and inaugurate a new cosmic period.

**Key words.** Rites of passage; Old and New Year; cosmological periodicity; *viudas de año viejo* (old year's widows); cosmic night.

### Introduction

The topic of the rites of passage is often traced back to the work of Arnold van Gennep, *The rites of passage* (1992 originally 1909), a classic book illustrating different human ceremonies, festivities or practices that make visible a transformation in the status, state or temporality of a person, a community or even the entire cosmos. These rites represent, sometimes dramatically, a profound transformation that will radically affect the nature of the individual or the community and in some cases will constitute the rebirth or appearance of a totally new identity. Wall and Ferguson state that these rituals 'can help us learn to harness the tension and pain that inevitably rolls through our lives' (Wall and Ferguson 1998: ix).

For the individual, rites of passage are usually performed in order to represent a change in his or her life, a change that may entail new responsibilities, roles, statuses, knowledge or states. This is visible in the passages from one marital status to another (marriage, divorce, widowhood), passages related to a new occupational role (initiation, retirement, a change of job), social status (slavery to freedom, elevation to a position of power, enthronement), separation from the profane world in order to deal with sacred responsibilities (consecration,

<sup>1</sup> Lecturer in Intercultural Theology, Seminario Sudamericano SEMISUD, Universidad Teológica del Caribe UTC (Quito, Ecuador and Saint Just, Puerto Rico). E-mail: djara@semisud.edu.ec

dedication, anointment), passages from one stage of life to another (childhood to adulthood, first menstruation, fatherhood) and many others.

On the community level, 'rites of passage [are] typical of small-scale societies' (Ries 1997: 163) and are visible at events that impact on social relations between the community's members, the living situation of the society or the daily routine of an entire community or nation. Through these rituals, entire societies negotiate the changes that are experienced and that legitimate the transformations that are about to happen. These rituals may be performed, for example, whenever a people or a community goes to war, invades new territories, legitimates the right to possess a specific land, experiences community reconciliation, or dedicates new temples, palaces or squares.

Furthermore, there is a special kind of rite of passage that relates to the concept of the periodicity of the cosmic time. These rites imply that the universe is itself governed by long periods of stability and short periods of chaos and renovation that have repercussions for human life as well. In the Andes case, dealt with here, these periods are known as *pachas*, which are:

followed or preceded, as appropriate, by other words which serve to determine spaces (cosmogonic or metaphysical), delimit historical phases (ages and periods *-in Waman Poma-*), express relative times (present, past and future), talk about fundamental changes (natural and social), set the times of harvests [and] define time-space as a globality of conjunction (*kay pacha*), among other tasks. (Manga 1994: 157)<sup>2</sup>

Because these rites represent the passage from one cosmic period to another, van Gennep affirms that 'we should [...] include among ceremonies of human passage those rites occasioned by celestial change such as the changeover [...] from season to season [...] and from year to year' (van Gennep 1992: 3-4).

The main aim of these festivities is not the celebration of a certain natural event or a physical phenomenon as such, but to remember and celebrate the *archetype* that is physically represented and can be found in different places, cultures and times, and appears to be constant. For instance, on the spring celebration, Friedrich states:

Its underlying pattern is the seasonal rhythm which can ultimately be reduced to the alternation of *kenosis* (emptying) and *plerosis* (filling): the evacuation of life in fall and winter, and its replenishment in spring and summer. This irreducible seasonal pattern may translate itself into [...] a great variety of rituals: death and rebirth, destruction and renovation, expulsion and reinstatement [...] and many more'. (Friedrich 2003: 163)

Festivities and rites around the change of the seasons can be interpreted as either rites of incorporation (into life in the case of spring) or rites of separation and death (as in winter rites).

<sup>2</sup> All quotes from Spanish and French have been translated by myself.

During these special times, it is not only the physical world which is transformed and renewed: in fact, physical revival (of nature in the case of the spring) is just a sign of a much deeper transformation that affects the individual, the society and even the entire cosmos. These periodic rituals and festivities show one period coming to an end through its destruction and the inauguration of a new period for which energies are renewed and a new cosmic time is established. This particular relationship to cyclical conceptions of time in Andean cultures is conceived as:

an evolutionary and non-deterministic time, made explicit in the succession / superposition of loops, where conjunctural or consequential futures [...] are generated in the immediate past as base projections, causing another space-time. [...] This spiral conception of overlapping times presents us with the cancellation of the contingent or structural future of linear nature (indefinite and unforeseeable future). Andean thought [...] does not identify [time] with linear historical conceptions with a final phase of salvationism or destiny, as in Western thought. (Manga 1994: 185)

### **New Year celebrations as rites of passage**

In modern societies, New Year celebrations are among the most important rites related to the passage from one temporal reality to another. They vary in their duration and structure from place to place, but the general thought of a temporary transition or passage seems to be a universally shared idea. Because of its importance and significance, the liminal period between the year that ends and the one that is about to start is the most suitable time for performing different kinds of rites. In this sense, some authors have approached New Year celebrations more as an individual ritual, while others argue that this is a liminal period that favours all kinds of different rites.

For example, authors such as Tozzer, Love and Taube have criticized Landa's interpretation of Mayan New Year celebrations as unique. They argue that he actually documented not one but three different rituals that take place during the New Year festival. Among them were the ceremony of *Wayeb* before the end of the year and rites of renewal at New Year in order to avoid calamities (see Kirkhusmo 2014: 176).

Eliade, based on the works of Frazer, Wensick, Dumézil and others, mentions some of the many rituals that are performed during this time:

The end of year and the beginning of the new year opens room to a set of rituals: 1) purges, purifications, confession of sins, [...] expulsion of the evil out of the city, etc.; 2) extinction and renovation of the fire; 3) masked processions (whose masks represent the souls of the dead), ceremonial reception of the dead, who are celebrated (banquets, etc.) and who, at the end of the feast, are guided to the limits of the locality, to the sea, the river, etc.; 4) combats between two enemy groups; 5) carnivalesque intermediate, saturnalia, inversion of the normal order, 'orgy'. (Eliade 1974: 182-183)

While it is true that not all these rites will be performed at the same time in a single ritual, they all point to the destruction of the old time in order to deliver a new and revived time that will reconfigure a new creation and cosmos. For example, in the ancient Babylonian empire,

during the twelve days of festivities of New Year, in the temple of Marduk, the priests used to recite the poem of the creation *Enuma Elish*. Through remembrance of the cosmogonic myth of the conflict between Marduk and the sea monster Tiamat, the priest restored the process of the genesis of the cosmos in order to establish a new creation at New Year.

Social structures and religious practices were formed at this idyllic moment of creation, when the cosmos was still in an embryonic phase. Through the destruction of these structures, the return to a primitive chaos is celebrated. The destruction and chaos that are part of these rites of passage make possible a new and regenerated society, time and cosmos. According to Eliade 'a cosmic cycle consists of a "creation", an existence ("history", exhaustion, degeneration) and a "return to the chaos"' (Eliade 1974: 192).

As a rite of passage, New Year celebrations show dramatically the constant human desire to restore the mythic time, the great time. Scholars in the fields of the phenomenology of religion and the comparative history of religion argue that this is, in fact, a common characteristic of every ritual: to recreate a part of what was done in *illo tempore*. For instance, Gerardus Van der Leeuw states that 'the original time is a model for all the times. What happened one-day is incessantly repeated. It is enough by knowing the myth in order to understand life' (van der Leeuw 1940: 120).

This 'archetypal' thesis has significant similarities to the work of the Swiss psychoanalyst Carl Jung and the concept of common patterns or notions that are part of the collective unconscious of different societies. It is in *illo tempore* when different cosmogonic actions took place, all the religious *archetypes* having been revealed by the gods or the civilizing heroes and also when the structures and practices that bring order to social, individual and cosmic relations and times were established. In *illo tempore* the seasons of the year and the cosmic periods were created, the cosmogonical events took place and at this time Indian castes appeared from Purusha's body, the gods adopted the Pharaohs, Satan was expelled from the court of Yahweh; and every practice or story whose legitimacy is grounded on divine decisions or acts came into existence.

New Year celebrations constitute one of the rites of passage that can lay claim to an almost universal practice. In what follows, I focus on one specific example of New Year's festivities, the Andean celebration of *año viejo* (Old Year), especially in modern Ecuador and Peru. Different rituals and practices that take place on this night will be described and interpreted, including physical representations of the year that is about to end, lighting ritual pyres (to cremate Old Year), special rituals at midnight and ritual transvestism.

### ***Año Viejo* (Old Year) celebrations in the Andes**

The celebration of *año viejo* in Andean cities consists of a set of different practices that

cannot be understood separately from one another. Because the year that is ending is conceptualized in the collective imaginary as an old man who is about to die, it is represented by a rag doll that is left lying in the street awaiting its imminent death. In the Ecuadorian Andes the past year is mostly represented by a doll made of old rags or newspapers, its size varying from very small figures to ones that are as big as an adult man. Anything that could make it look more like a human being may be used, especially ties, jackets, shoes and hats.

Because the doll represents the year that is about to die, in many years it is identified with an influential person that marked the year, such as a political figure, a football player, a celebrity or another important person. Because the ritual will end after the doll has been burned, figures who are not socially popular are frequently the object of derision or mockery. Thus in many cases the doll that will be burned represents a president, a congressman or any politician involved in a corruption scandal. Nevertheless, because the custom is for one *año viejo* to be made per family, sometimes the doll represents a respected member of the family such as a grandfather, father, uncle or a good family friend.

It is interesting to observe that most of the dolls represent male figures; only on very rare occasions do they represent a female person or figure. This double factor of respect and mockery towards the same reputable person or institution is a very characteristic feature of this liminal time. For example, Stiebing and Helft, commenting on a similar but more dramatic ritual during the Babylonian New Year, the *Akitu*, state:

Often understood as the ritual renewal of Marduk's triumph over chaos, the *Akitu* also served to restore the legitimacy of the king. On the fifth day of the festival, the king would enter the shrine of Marduk where a priest removed his royal insignia (staff, ring, mace and crown). Then the priest slapped the king across the face, and forced him to kneel. The king, thus humiliated, had to defend his piety to Marduk [...] The priest then slapped him a second time. If tears fell from his eyes, the gods were favorable to him and Babylon was to have a good year. (Stiebing and Helft 2017: 262)

In order to identify the doll with one specific person or situation, its face is usually covered with a mask that makes the representation more obvious. During the days coming up to the end of the year, special markets are set up in various cities offering masks based on the faces of well-known personalities. This practice is different on the Ecuadorian Pacific coast. In cities like Guayaquil or Machala the creation of the *años viejos* is a much more complex and specialized activity. Here, several families work on the creation of very well-designed *años viejos* during the entire year, or at the latest from June or July, making models with an internal structure that can hold dozens of kilograms of weight without collapsing. Using a combination of wood, glue and paper, the craftsmen can build structures that sometimes reach a height of eight to ten metres. The structures are decorated with paint and all kinds of ornaments.

While these *años viejos* are exactly the same as those in the Andean area, again representing the year that is dying, nowadays on the Pacific coast they take the form of all kind of figures: superheroes, cartoon characters, politicians, fantastic animals and monsters, something hardly seen in Quito, the capital of Ecuador in the Andes, where almost all the *años viejos* are designed in the form of a known person. Weeks before the end of year, the craftsmen offer their creations in the streets of the city, individuals or institutions buy them for a range of prices. Small and simple *años viejos* can be bought for a very few American dollars, while the most expensive ones are offered for several thousand dollars.<sup>3</sup>

During the afternoon of the 31<sup>st</sup> of December it is common to read the ‘will’ of the year that is about to die. This will is written in houses, offices and educational institutions in order to remember the good and bad things that happened during the past year. By using verses and rhymes, the Old Year distributes all his possessions among his family and friends. The main interest of the ‘will of the Old Year’ is to ridicule other members of the social group and to make fun of their mistakes or remark on their lack. On some occasions the will may also mention certain tragedies such as natural disasters, diseases and deaths that the community wants to forget or get over. At night, before the *año viejo* is burned, the will is placed next to him and at midnight both are burnt together.

The most famous practice at Ecuador’s New Year, thanks to its extravagance and open defiance of Latin American heteronormativity, is the presence of the *viudas de año viejo* (widows of the Old Year) or *viudas de fin de año* (widows of the end of the year). Because the Old Year is considered to be a respectable man in society, it is natural to consider him a married one. Due to his approaching death, his widow’s role is to mourn and cry over her loss of status. From the afternoon of 31<sup>st</sup> of December, several young men dress as widows their duty being to weep for the death of their husband (the Old Year) and to walk the streets begging money from those who pass by. They usually stop cars or buses in order to beg for some coins so they can survive now that their husband will no longer be there to provide for all their needs.

During the afternoon before New Year, some young men experience complete transvestism, female relatives providing them with feminine clothes and making them up. While some decades ago these young men used to dress exactly like widows (in black clothing and veils), nowadays they wear short skirts, colourful wigs and provocative dresses to beg for money. The old focus on making people feel pity for them in order to obtain money has therefore developed into a new focus on eroticism as a means of acquiring such charity.

The clothes these ‘widows’ wear include wigs of different colours, intense make-up, fake breasts and buttocks, skirts, blouses, nylon stockings and high heels. Even though they can

<sup>3</sup> The US dollar is Ecuador’s official currency.

hardly be considered ritual neophytes in the classical sense of the term (it is not mandatory to be an Old Year widow, and one can act the role several times in one's life), they do share some of the characteristics of ritual neophytes. For instance, on one night they experience a liminal state in which they cannot be considered either men or women. Turner explains this ritual principle: 'The structural "invisibility" of liminal *personae* has a twofold character. They are at once no longer classified and not yet classified' (Turner 1964: 48).

This is a common characteristic of ritual neophytes during the liminal period, when they 'are symbolically either sexless or bisexual and may be regarded as a kind of human *prima materia*' (ibid.: 49). Furthermore, because of their position as beggars, their situation is indeed the very prototype of sacred poverty. Rights over property, goods and services rest on the place of the person in the socio-political structure: since they do not occupy any such positions, neophytes exercise no such rights (ibid.: 49).

These *viudas de año viejo* (widows of Old Year) are rarely found in isolation from other 'widows'. In most cases, large groups of young men walk the streets stopping the traffic and asking for money from everyone they find on their way. Once in the condition of 'widows', strong ties of camaraderie are supposed to develop between them. For a night, the 'widows' live in a situation of complete equality. Any differences due to socioeconomic status, educational background or ethnicity are avoided in order to create an extremely equalitarian relation. As Gordon explains of communitarian rites of passage, 'among neophytes there is a complete equality' (Gordon 1997: 107).

This condition is reflected in the use they make of the money they have received during the night. By tradition, all the 'widows' of the group collect the money into a common fund during the celebration. Once the event is close to finishing at about two or three in the morning, the 'widows' decide how to use the money they have collected. Sometimes it will be divided between them in equal parts, but it is more common to spend it on something they will all enjoy, for example, alcohol or cigarettes.

As mentioned before, the performances of the *viudas de año viejo* have experienced a complete turnaround in recent decades. Before the 1980s the main role of these widows was to cry out aloud and to mourn because of the death of their 'husband'. Nowadays, their efforts mainly focus on dancing, erotic songs and seducing men in order to receive more money for their performances. The new role of eroticism and its demonstration on public streets and squares during the festivity reminds one of the 'orgies' or bacchanalia of New Year in different civilizations. Eliade notes of these events that even when

its violence varies widely, the orgy is also a return to the 'dark', a restoration of the primordial chaos, and as such, it precedes every creation, every manifestation of the organized forms [...]

the fact that the orgy is part of the ceremonials that indicate periodic cuts in the time, shows the *desire to integrally abolish the past, abolishing the creation.*<sup>4</sup> (Eliade 1974: 184)

Through eroticism and sexual practices between the widows and the public during this night, the destruction of all legitimate behaviours in the form of heterosexuality, marriage, the law, institutions and respect for the authorities is consummated. Indeed, it is common for the 'widows' to look for policemen, firefighters, politicians or people of good reputation and influence in order to perform all kind of dances for them, with their sexual innuendos.

It is common to observe a total transformation of political, social and economic structures during these liminal periods. For example, it is on Saturnalia that the satirical Roman dialogue between Horace, the master, and Davus, the slave, takes place. Fitzgerald explains: 'Horace allows Davus to speak because it is the festival of the *Saturnalia*, a time of freedom from restraints, especially for slaves who were allowed various symbolic liberties. During the *Saturnalia*, slaves dined with their masters and, according to some accounts, masters waited upon their slaves' (Fitzgerald 2000: 20).

Those who assist at this festival usually wear masks, make-up and different outfits that prevent relatives, friends or colleagues from identifying them. The use of masks and grotesque outfits in these kinds of celebrations has been examined by several different authors. While some accept Edson's interpretation (2009: 180) of the use of masks at rites of passage as the symbolic presence of the dead, who in this imperfect state are awaiting resurrection, again the Old Year being a venerable elder ready to die, van Gennep's understanding of the use of masks during rites of passage as a means of reshaping individual identities (and in the Ecuadorian celebration, community and cosmological identities as well) should also be considered.

The passage between Old Year and New Year reaches its climax at midnight when the Old Year has just finished. The *años viejos* are burnt in front of the houses of the families that have made or bought them. It is common to observe fires all along the streets at midnight. On many occasions, the *años viejos* are doused with petrol and filled with explosives. Some people also jump over the burning *año viejo* in a clear sign of the transition from one *pacha* to another and the passage it entails. The study of the altar of fire as an element of rites of passage has a long history in anthropological research about New Year festivities. For instance, Eliade states:

In effect, the altar of fire reproduced the universe and its erection was equivalent to the creation of the world; every time that one of these altars was built, the archetypical act of creation was repeated and time was 'built' (cf. *Catapha Brahmana*, VI, 5,1s; 'the altar of fire is the year', *ibid.*, X, 5, 4, 10; the altar of fire has 'five layers... [every layer is a season], the five seasons

<sup>4</sup> Eliade's emphasis.

make a year and Agni [= el altar] is the year',<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, VI, 8, 1, 15). (Eliade 1974: 189-90)

Thus at twelve midnight the *años viejos* are burned in the streets, all kinds of explosives are detonated, and fireworks are lit. Most houses will turn off their lights, and for a short period of time the only light is that from the fires in the streets, which recalls the practice of turning off the lights and lighting candles during birthday celebrations as a passage between one old time to a new one. People shout and dance around the fires, and the *años viejos* are beaten to symbolize leaving behind the year that has just finished. The frenzy is finally completed with alcohol, loud music and dances.

During this night, there is an explicit desire on the part of the society to destroy everything that gives order to the cosmos: the old *pacha* is destroyed by burning the *años viejos*; the skies are burned and ripped by all kinds of fireworks; social, economic and political authorities are no longer respected; the 'widows' challenge the classical heteronormativity of Latin American societies; and moral laws are negated through the consumption of alcohol and music. In conclusion, the entire old cosmos, with its rules and order, is left behind, and a real passage is experienced in order to live a new cosmic time. It is this night of destruction and cosmic chaos that Eliade calls 'the cosmic night'. And further:

The 'cosmic night' [is the night] on which all the 'shapes' lose their contours and are confused. On the cosmological reality, 'darkness' and chaos are the same thing, like re-igniting the fire symbolizes the creation, the restoration of forms and boundaries. [...] In a certain way, it could be said that in the 'darkness' and the 'chaos' established by the liquidation of the old year all the modalities come together [...] ('night' = 'deluge' = dissolution). (Eliade 1974: 183)

On this night all kind of superstitious practices take place. For example, it is common to attract money for the coming year by putting banknotes inside the shoe or wearing yellow underwear. If an individual wants to attract love, red underwear is worn. Those who want to travel during the year that is about to begin may walk around the neighbourhood with an empty suitcase. It is a common practice to eat twelve grapes which represent the twelve months of the coming year, and to make one wish for each grape at midnight.

In the Peruvian region of Huarochirí, the game of the *pichcamanta* takes place. The leaders of the Pacota community ask the spirits called the 'owners' and the snow-capped mountains of the Pariacaca mountain range for their blessings for the New Year. The 'owners' announce the place of the coming rains by the leaders of the community throwing a pyramidal dice into the air at the cry of '*Huayra huayra pichcamanta!*' ('the ace, the ace of the five!'). The place on the playground at which the dice falls (mountains or coast) shows where rain will fall during the coming year (Salomon 2002: 13-16).

These practices are very similar to the Babylonian celebration of New Year. During the

<sup>5</sup> Eliade's emphasis.

twelve days of the *Akitu*, the Zagnuk was celebrated, a festivity in which a prototype of the coming twelve months was elaborated by the priests (Bertman 2003: 130-131). Similarly, Al-Biruni states of the Persian New Year or *Nauroz*: ‘On the same day the Happy lots are distributed among the people of the earth. Therefore the Persians call it “*the day of the hope*”’ (Al-Biruni 1879: 201). Similar references can be made to the Feast of the Tabernacles (based on Wensinck’s research) and the Chinese tradition (based on Franet’s work).

In spite of all the connotations of destruction that can be observed during this night, because it is a rite of passage a new *pacha* must be opened and experienced. In many cities on the Ecuadorian Pacific coast the purity and innocence of this new time is represented by the practice of welcoming in the New Year by wearing white clothes. Immediately after the burnings of the New Year, people come back home, change their clothes for new white ones and return to the streets in order to participate in the New Year dances and parties. Thus, the rite of passage has been carried out and a new *pacha* been inaugurated.

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REVIEW ARTICLE

THE KURDISH QUEST FOR A DEMOCRATIC CIVILIZATION, THROUGH  
DEMOCRATIC CONFEDERALISM AND A SOCIOLOGY OF FREEDOM

FELIX PADEL,<sup>1</sup> OMAR SADIK<sup>2</sup> AND MALVIKA GUPTA<sup>3</sup>

**ABDULLAH ÖCALAN**, *Manifesto for a Democratic Civilization, vol. II. Capitalism: The Age of Unmasked Gods and Naked Kings*, translated from Turkish into English by Havin Guneser, Porsgrunn (Norway) and Cologne: New Compass Press, 2017.

**THOMAS JEFFREY MILEY AND FEDERICO VENTURINI** (eds.), *Your Freedom and Mine: Abdullah Öcalan and the Kurdish Question in Erdoğan's Turkey* (Foreword by Dilar Dirik), Montreal, Chicago and London: Black Rose Books, 2018.

The two books reviewed here are exceptional in many ways. One is the latest volume of prison writings by Abdullah Öcalan – a work full of inspiration and profound insights, yet due to the circumstances it was written in, often repetitive and hard to grasp, let alone summarize. The other is a book about Öcalan and the fascinating, anguished complexities of the Kurdish situation in Turkey and beyond to which he has devoted his life.

The life history of Abdullah Öcalan reads like a fairy tale, transcending many norms to form a unique tapestry. Founding member and leader of the PKK (Partiya Karkara Kurdistan, or the Kurdish Workers' Party), which has been on the 'world terrorist list' since 1994 (although not considered as such by the UN and certain countries), he was based during most of the period from 1980 to 1998 in northern Syria, which is why the Rojava enclave there (also known as the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria) has such reverence for his ideas, orienting its political structure towards Öcalan's concepts, especially democratic confederalism and 'Jineology'.<sup>4</sup> In 1998, under pressure from Turkey, the Syrian government asked him to leave, and he visited in turn Russia, Italy and Greece, each of which turned him away under Turkish or US pressure. Offered asylum in South Africa by Nelson Mandela (who was persuaded to do so by Judge Essa Moosa and Archbishop Desmond Tutu), the Greeks flew him to Kenya instead, where he was eventually

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<sup>1</sup> Research Affiliate in the School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography, University of Oxford; and currently (January-March 2019) Distinguished Visiting Professor at Shiv Nadar University in India. E-mail: [felishmr@gmail.com](mailto:felishmr@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> Holder of MA degree from the Department of Asian and African Studies, Humboldt Universität zu Berlin, for thesis analysing Öcalan's writings; has conducted fieldwork in northern Kurdistan over several years. E-mail [osaedik@gmail.com](mailto:osaedik@gmail.com)

<sup>3</sup> Doctoral student at the Department of International Development, University of Oxford. E-mail: [malvika.gupta@qeh.ox.ac.uk](mailto:malvika.gupta@qeh.ox.ac.uk).

<sup>4</sup> This concept, from the Kurdish words for woman (*jin*) and life (*jiyan*), is elaborated in Öcalan's book *Liberating Life: Woman's Revolution*, Cologne: International Initiative, 2013, available at <http://www.freeocalan.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/liberating-Lifefinal.pdf>

arrested, after leaving the Greek embassy under false assurances, and was flown to Turkey with Israeli help. Condemned to death there, his sentence was commuted to life imprisonment on İmralı Island in the Sea of Marmora, and during the last twenty years, from 1999-2019, he has been in solitary confinement there, guarded by over 1,000 Turkish soldiers. In jail, he has managed to write a number of extraordinary books, which have had a momentous impact on Kurds and many others, making numerous peace and ceasefire initiatives, such that *Time* magazine listed him among the world's hundred most influential people in 2013.<sup>5</sup>

The first volume of his prison writings was published in English in 2007 under the intriguing title *The Roots of Civilization*.<sup>6</sup> After this, Öcalan started on a new work in several volumes with the overall title of *Manifesto for a Democratic Civilization*. The first volume was subtitled *Civilization: The Age of Masked Gods and Disguised Kings*, the idea behind it being that the manifestations of divinity revered from ancient polytheistic cultures to Reformation Christianity, and the kings and emperors who exercised power throughout ancient and medieval history up to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, were somehow disguising or masking their power.<sup>7</sup> The new volume, written in Turkish between 2008 and 2011, deals with the age of capitalism, conceived as *The Age of Unmasked Gods and Naked Kings*. The third volume – will it ever see light of day? – is conceived as a *Sociology of Freedom*.

All these prison writings are written in the loose form of a judicial defence, which often expands into defence in a much broader sense. The introduction to the new volume starts: 'As I pursue my defence against the capitalist system, I know that I have to start by breaking loose from its system of mental chains' (2017: 25). Throughout this volume, Öcalan argues that capitalism is not primarily an economic system and that Marx was mistaken in analysing it as such. It is better viewed as a power structure, and even as a religion, being characterized by deeply ingrained dogmas that control us and that need mental effort to break free from. Öcalan says that living and writing in jail paradoxically gave him the freedom for self-examination and searching for the truth that he would have found hard to attain outside. Among a long list of outstanding writings from inside (or about being inside) jail, some by Gandhi emphasize how transformative treating jail as a 'sacred space' can be for achieving mental clarity, despite the restrictions, humiliations and frequent violence.<sup>8</sup> Öcalan's writings are evidently forged in a similar experience and consciousness: 'Prison exists on the outside as well as the inside.... I was able to grasp in a profound

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<sup>5</sup> <http://time100.time.com/2013/04/18/time-100/slide/abdullah-ocalan/>

<sup>6</sup> London: Pluto Press, translated by Klaus Happel. Padel reviewed this and the next two volumes of his prison writings (*The PKK and the Kurdish Question in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* and *The Roadmap to Negotiations*) in *Economic & Political Weekly* in October 2012 (available at <http://peaceinkurdistancampaign.com/resources/abdullah-ocalan/road-map/the-kurdish-quest-of-countering-capitalism-to-build-a-democratic-civilisation/>).

<sup>7</sup> Padel reviewed this volume on the Gandhi Foundation website in 2016 (available at <https://gandhifoundation.files.wordpress.com/2016/04/ocalan-review.pdf>).

<sup>8</sup> Extensive writings by Gandhi from jail, published in *Young India*, January-May 1924, are available at <https://sites.google.com/site/excerptsfromgandhisworks/1924-02-my-jail-experiences>'s writings in jail

sense that I was in fact a dogmatic positivist'.<sup>9</sup> The present volume rejects the positivist approach and the 'scientific method' because of the subject-object dualism and the divorce between rationality and emotional intelligence which he sees as intrinsic to the mental slavery induced by capitalism. As an erstwhile Marxist-Leninist leader who still accepts Marx as a major influence, he now castigates the Marxist framework for its positivism and its inability to analyse the concepts of 'power' and 'the state' (2017: 30).

It is surprising that neither Öcalan nor most of his commentators mention Gramsci much, even though the latter's *Prison Notebooks* bear significant comparison with Öcalan's prison writings, especially in Gramsci's concepts of 'cultural hegemony' and his critique of 'economism' and the 'economic determinism' in Marx's writings, but also in the need for a 'counter-hegemony' forged by 'organic intellectuals' – a description that fits Öcalan as surely as it does Gramsci himself. One difference is that Öcalan no longer defines himself as a Marxist – which is probably why his works are ignored by so many on the left.

*The Age of Unmasked Gods and Naked Kings* is divided into four sections. The first, 'Factors that gave rise to capitalism', emphasizes the rationalism or analytical intelligence that accompanied patriarchy as a key factor, other prominent factors being economism (market/money), industrialism, class hierarchy and urbanization, Protestantism (developing Weber's thesis on this) and the 'virtualization of life' that has expanded rapidly through computers and mobiles since Öcalan's incarceration.

As so often in his writings, Öcalan's method is to take us through a *longue durée* of human history from prehistoric times to the present. What is refreshing and provocative in this overview is the 'indigenous Middle Eastern' perspective, with its constant emphasis on the geography of the first civilizations. Specifically, what is now Kurdistan and/or the 'Fertile Crescent' (Mesopotamia/Iraq) is where most of the world's first urban centres evolved, as analysed by archaeologists: first the towns or large villages emblematic of the 'Neolithic revolution', where sedentary farming, the domestication of livestock and pottery evolved out of hunter-gatherer society; then the Ubaid and Halaf cultures, that began a move towards urban centres, culminating in 'the original city-state civilization called Uruk (4,000-3,000 BCE)',<sup>10</sup> associated with Gilgamesh and the goddess Inanna (also Eanna or Ishtar).

Öcalan often emphasizes how emerging patriarchy and the 'housewifization' of women was accompanied by a shift in mythology in which Inanna was defeated by the male god Enki, whose cult displaced hers, which also became debased into temple prostitution – a symbol of women's subjugation and enslavement. The Sumerian ziggurat is seen as the first locus of 'masked gods and disguised kings', with gods on the top floor, priests in the middle and slaves creating surplus wealth at the bottom.

The Greeks and Romans, who are central to most European perceptions of our civilizational roots, are seen as derivative, which is indeed how Greeks saw

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<sup>9</sup> From 'Seek the Truth' (pp. 317-18), a text Öcalan wrote in 2011, read at a conference Padel attended at the University of Hamburg in 2012, and included in the volume under review here edited by Miley and Venturini, pp. 315-322.

<sup>10</sup> 2017: 71.

themselves: as having learnt civilized ways and deep knowledge from the Babylonians and Egyptians through influential thinkers who had travelled to these areas, such as Solon, Herodotus and Pythagoras.

What is also particularly original in Öcalan's telling of ancient history is his emphasis on those tribal groups who formed confederations that resisted incorporation into the Sumerian, Babylonian and Assyrian empires, and eventually, at certain moments, overthrew them. From Sargon to the Assyrians, the 'emergence of civilization' aspect accompanied an extremely bloodthirsty glorification of violence and conquest. Resisting incorporation into the Sumerian and Babylonian city states were the Gutians, a proto-Kurdish people who spoke an Indo-Aryan language, unlike the Semitic Akkadian-Amorite language family of the mainstream, whose conflict with the Akkadian empire before 2,000 BC brought about its downfall; also the Hurrians, similarly Indo-European and associated with the Kassite-Hittite alliance that ended the 'first Babylonian period' around 1,596 BC, and the Mitanni; and also the Medes, who formed a federation (mainly, it seems, from peoples of Hurrian origin) that destroyed the Assyrian empire in 612 BC.<sup>11</sup>

The continuity between these Indo-Aryan tribes and the Kurds is attested archeologically and linguistically; and their refusal to be assimilated by the hierarchical, militaristic 'civilizations' neighbouring them provides a precedent for Kurdish resistance to the four main nation states that divided Kurdistan between them after the First World War.

The second section, 'Capitalism – the mortal enemy of economy', starts with Öcalan's own experience of schooling and his attraction to, and reaction against, the new gods of modernity. Emphasizing the original Greek meaning of *oikonomia* as 'household management', 'economy' emerges as women's domain and expertise, but was taken over from Neolithic society by priests and kings to create a surplus by waging war and enslavement through plunder. From the ancient Sumerians, boasting of their bloody wars, to thirteenth-century Renaissance Italians, who invented banking, and 16<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century English merchants, plundering the produce and surplus of other peoples is not 'economy' but power, while 'war waged for the sake of capitalism is but *the ritual of human sacrifice*' (2017: 139).

Section 3, 'The Modern Leviathan', takes on the nation state, tracing its crystallization through the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, and citing Hegel's conception of it as 'the descent of God on earth' – initially in the form of the French model elaborated by Napoleon, which was followed in modern Turkey by Atatürk. German hegemony emerged through Bismarck forging Prussia into Germany and defeating the French republic, while England developed a third model. Each one brought attributes of 'God' into the state, and it is this God-like demand for worship by the modern nation state that he describes himself imbibing and reacting against as a child. This will have strong resonance for anyone growing up in a situation of direct or internal colonialism, where the school insists that every individual stands in line to worship the national symbols, and teachers become like priests of this nation-state

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.: 149-62.

religion. From the time of Descartes, God had become increasingly irrelevant in the image of ‘divine watch-maker’ promoted by science: ‘After God’s initial push, the universe is set into a continuous mechanical motion’ (2017: 204).

This chapter devotes a sub-section to Jewish victims of Nazi genocide, tracing their history as those who, under Abraham and Moses, destroyed the idols of their Babylonian captors to create monotheism to their role as merchants who lent to the Netherlands’ and America’s wars of independence from Spain and Britain. This recalls Spinoza, who, as a Jewish secularist, taught that to understand is to be free. Jews’ relationship with capitalism and Zionist nationalism, like Arab nationalism, can only be understood and solved by recognizing their common Middle Eastern origins.

The last section, ‘In the time of capitalist modernity’, looks at how even greater capital surpluses began to be created by large-scale international trade funded by speculation (following Fernand Braudel), as nation states crystallized out of ‘empires’ and money came to assume its present position of defining human relations, almost as an embodiment of the power of the nation state (2017: 266). Since the time of Britain’s hegemony, emerging out of the Industrial Revolution to defeat Napoleon, and then Germany in the twentieth century, industrialism is seen as a crucial aspect of capitalist modernity. Öcalan takes issue with the Marxist tradition that sees industrialization as necessary for the formation of a working class, given that the internal colonization of the countryside by producing shanty towns of slave-like workers to serve the factories represents a violence as cruel as external colonialism. ‘Industrialism attacks the living environment as a whole’ (p. 276), and our present age faces the monstrous reality that our economism and industrialism, presided over by the ‘priests’ of the system who meet annually at Davos, is destroying the fabric of life on earth.

Here we see the influence of Murray Bookchin, whose *Ecology of Freedom* (1982) added a crucial environmental and eco-socialist dimension to Öcalan’s thinking, and of the Kurdish political systems that have emerged to implement his thought. Other strands invoke a wide range of thinkers, including Immanuel Wallerstein and his world systems theory, emphasizing centre and periphery,<sup>12</sup> and Braudel’s *longue durée*, among many other thinkers. The book has a preface by Radha D’Souza, who places this book in a (South) Asian perspective and relates it to Marxian scholarship.

As a background to understanding Öcalan and his influence, and before considering the new book on this, it seems helpful to give an overview of Kurdish history during the last hundred years, drawing on two excellent recent scholarly works by David McDowall and Michael Gunter.<sup>13</sup> The former starts from the reasons that this history is so little known: Kurdish identity was suppressed ruthlessly because it crossed the national borders that have divided up the Middle East since 1919-1923, and even Turkish intellectuals who have stood up for it in recent decades face long jail sentences for doing so. ‘Kurdistan’ was an entity recognised from the twelfth

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<sup>12</sup> Wallerstein: *The Modern World System* (vols. 1-3, 1974, 1980, 1989), New York: Academic Press.

<sup>13</sup> McDowall 2007, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, London: I.B. Tauris; Gunter 2016, *The Kurds: A Modern History*, Princeton NJ: Marcus Wiener.

century up until the 1920s, when the term was banned by the new nation states of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria, created under the Treaties of Sèvres and Lausanne by Britain and France. Mustafa Kemal (Ataturk) spoke freely of 'Kurdistan' during his early years in power, when the Kurds were vital allies in his project of dismantling the Ottoman power structure to create a new state; but he then banned the term as part of the vicious suppression of the Kurdish language and autonomy from 1923-5 onwards. Before 1923, Kemal had spoken of a unity of Turks and Kurds in the face of foreign interference, which at times backed the Greek and Armenian minorities. Kurds had participated in the Armenian Genocide of 1915 for complex reasons, but soon began to face their own cultural and linguistic genocide. To some extent this was also the case in Iraq, where the RAF, masterminded by 'Bomber' Harris, forced their submission to Arab rule, followed later by massive bloodshed and repression under Saddam Hussein; and in Iran, which, like the other new nations, suppressed any promise of autonomy with great cruelty. In Turkey, the use of Kurdish was banned in the law courts and other public spaces in 1924. Shaykh Said's rebellion and the Kurdish organization and movement known as Azadi were violently suppressed in 1925, as were other rebellions in other areas in 1926-37, with hundreds of executions and countless massacres, creating a pattern that has continued ever since of villages razed and populations deported whenever Kurds defied the 'implacable Kemalism' of the Turkish state.

The PKK, which Öcalan set up in 1978, began with attacks on traditional landlords, who were seen as highly exploitative, and the movement has always fought on two fronts: against feudalism and patriarchy on the one hand, and against Turkish state oppression on the other. Öcalan avoided the round-up of Kurdish and left-wing activists that immediately followed the coup in 1980 by escaping to northern Syria, while other PKK cadres based themselves in northern Iraq, which has suffered repeated Turkish incursions since 1983. Regular armed resistance by the PKK against Turkish forces started in 1984, and has gone through many phases.

Iraqi Kurdistan gained autonomy in October 1991, after a bloodily suppressed uprising and years of intense oppression, including chemical bombing in 1987-8, under Saddam Hussein. The Kurdistan Regional Government there (KRG) depends on an uneasy alliance between the KDP (Kurdish Democratic Party) and the PUK (Patriotic Union of Kurdistan), who have frequently clashed. The PKK generally considers these parties as feudal or tribal in structure, while they and the KRG veer between on-off contact with the PKK.

The autonomous Rojava government was set up in northern Syria in 2012 and has been in the frontline of fighting Islamic State (ISIS or Daesh); during the siege of Kobane by Daesh in 2014-15, this caught the world's attention. Without a formal alliance with the PKK, it is clear that ideologically they are close, which is why the Turkish forces have attacked Rojava, invading and overrunning the enclave of Afrin in January 2018. Presently they are also seen as threatening Rojava as a whole given the prospect of the withdrawal of air cover by the US, which allied itself with the Rojava government (PYD or Democratic Union Party) and military (YPG or Peoples'

Protection Units), especially in defeating IS in their ‘capital’ of Raqqa in October 2017.<sup>14</sup>

The other book reviewed here, *Your Freedom and Mine*, emerged out of an international peace delegation organized by the EU Turkic Civic Commission known as the İmralı peace delegations, which intended (but failed) to meet Öcalan in his İmralı Island prison. The first 120 pages of this book are an eminently readable and balanced historical summary of the Kurdish–Turkish conflict by the Cambridge political sociologist Thomas Jeffery Miley, with Cihad Hammy and Guney Yıldız. This concentrates on the Turkish situation and the PKK, its formation and use of violence, as well as ceasefires, and it touches on the NATO ‘Gladio’ or ‘Counter-Guerilla’<sup>15</sup> organization’s involvement in state terror through paramilitary organizations such as the Grey Wolves.

The following chapters, by Adem Uzun and Havin Guneser (translator of Öcalan 2017 and other writings), summarize the PKK itinerary and Öcalan’s life, including the international campaign for his release and his participation in peace talks. There follow many short articles by a wide selection of participants in the four İmralı delegations that visited Turkey in 2016–17, from many countries and professions. These include British journalist Jonathan Steele, MP Julie Ward, trade unionist Simon Dubbins and Father Joe Ryan, with testimonies from similarly eminent personalities from Iceland, Norway, Denmark, Germany, France, Italy, the Basque country (two of these longstanding MEPs) and the United States, including Janet Biehl, close collaborator with Murray Bookchin, author<sup>16</sup> and translator of a major recent book on Rojava.<sup>17</sup>

Several other contributors have also conducted research on Kurdish issues, including Michael Gunter,<sup>18</sup> whose article on the advantages of taking the PKK off the terrorist list is one of the concluding pieces in this book; also by Reimar Heider,<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> ‘Kurds in Syria: We Have Right to Respond to Turkish Attacks’, by Sirwan Kajjo in *Extremism Watch*, 31 October 2018, at <https://www.voanews.com/a/kurds-in-syria-we-have-right-to-respond-to-turkish-attacks-/4637931.html>; ‘Turkey sends reinforcements to Syrian border’, *Al Jazeera*, 23 December 2018, at <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/12/turkey-increases-military-deployment-syrian-border-181223093326924.html>; ‘America’s Kurdish allies risk being wiped out – by NATO’, by David Graeber in *The Guardian*, 1<sup>st</sup> February 2019, at [https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/feb/01/americas-kurdish-allies-syria-turkey-nato?CMP=share\\_btn\\_tw&fbclid=IwAR1CCLCUCgAMB3TDvHtyxjNpAjo7VgMwe4GwCwDp6Q8aU6PJ3csGws5KgAU](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/feb/01/americas-kurdish-allies-syria-turkey-nato?CMP=share_btn_tw&fbclid=IwAR1CCLCUCgAMB3TDvHtyxjNpAjo7VgMwe4GwCwDp6Q8aU6PJ3csGws5KgAU);

<sup>15</sup> Wikipedia articles on Counter-Guerilla, Ergenekon (conspiracy) and Operation Gladio summarize evidence on these intensely controversial subjects, which have been topics of intense debate in Turkey, with several Turkish prime ministers speaking out publicly.

<sup>16</sup> Her books include *The Murray Bookchin Reader* (as editor, London: Cassell, 1997); *The Politics of Social Ecology* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1998); *Ecology or Catastrophe: The Life of Murray Bookchin* (New York: Oxford University Press).

<sup>17</sup> *Revolution in Rojava: Democratic Autonomy and Women’s Liberation in the Syrian Kurdistan*, by Michael Knapp, Ercan Ayboga and Anja Flach, translated from German by Janet Biehl, London: Pluto Press, 2016.

<sup>18</sup> Including *Out of Nowhere: The Kurds of Syria in Peace and War*, London: C. Hurst, 2014, as well as his book on Kurdish history mentioned in note 13, above.

<sup>19</sup> Translator from Turkish of several of Öcalan’s books and a spokesman for the Freedom for Öcalan Campaign.

Kariane Westrheim,<sup>20</sup> Radha D'Souza and Mohammed Elnaiem, a student of Miley's at Cambridge University from a background in the black libertarian movement who studied the Kurdish youth movement in Europe. Dilar Dirik, who wrote the Foreword for *Your Freedom and Mine*, is a leading spokeswoman for the Kurdish women's movement and a scholar at Cambridge University.<sup>21</sup> Prefaces by the book's two editors are followed by a note from the publisher at Black Rose Books, Dimitrios Roussopoulos.

Both Öcalan's position as a thinker and writer, and the history and present situation of the Kurds, deserve a much wider understanding and influence in world affairs. For one thing, they raise the question – much needed in light of present-day despair and cynicism over a multitude of issues – of whether our human species can develop into a 'democratic civilization', to a point of living within our means environmentally and economically, and sharing the earth's resources without resorting to war.

For another thing, Öcalan's model of democratic confederalism has been put into practice in Rojava in a way that – whatever faults it may have in the current situation of defence against the powerful enemies that surround it – is radically multi-ethnic and ensures equal status for women: if Daesh represents the most misogynist political formation of recent times, Rojava, in the front line against it, has a claim to being the most emancipatory system for women that has ever existed.

On religion, spirituality and myth versus the atheist position customary among Marxist thinkers, Öcalan steers a refreshingly non-dogmatic position. This is of great significance in the Middle East, where religious controversy is so sensitive, but it also reflects great openness, taking us to the roots of philosophy, with a constant questioning of what we are here for, and grounded in an impressive range of history and literature. The conception of 'economy' emphasized in his 2017 book offers a return to the term's root meaning of the correct management of resources, satisfying basic needs and non-profit-making exchange, which could yet prove extremely fruitful.<sup>22</sup>

For anthropologists and sociologists, as if this wasn't enough, Öcalan's vision of a 'sociology of freedom' offers a way forward out of sterile academic debates towards ways of implementing real change. His critique of civilization conjures up the famous answer attributed to Gandhi when he came to Britain for the last time in 1931 and was asked, "What do you think of modern [or Western] civilization?", to which he replied

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<sup>20</sup> Professor of Educational Science at the University of Bergen, Westrheim did her doctoral dissertation on the PKK's system of education, and has done fieldwork in Kurdish areas of Turkey and Syria; cited in the BBC feature by Yesim Yaprak Yildiz, 'Turkey and the PKK: The Women Who Take Up Arms', 15 January 2013, at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-21026273>

<sup>21</sup> See, e.g., 'The Kurdish Struggle: An Interview with Dilar Dirik', *Salvage*, 8 March 2017, at <http://salvage.zone/online-exclusive/the-kurdish-struggle-an-interview-with-dilar-dirik/>

<sup>22</sup> My reading of Öcalan throughout this article has benefited greatly from Omar Sadik's MA thesis, *Philosophy and History in the Prison Writings of Abdullah Öcalan*, in Global Studies at the Institute for Asian and African Studies, Humboldt University, Berlin, 2017.

‘I think it would be a very good idea’.<sup>23</sup> For social scientists, Öcalan’s writings resonate with engaged anthropology, as presented by Stuart Kirsch and others.<sup>24</sup>

Issues such as freedom and genocide resonate far beyond the Kurdish situation. Kurdish populations in several countries have certainly faced attempts at linguistic and cultural genocide, and while they participated in the Armenian genocide, they themselves also faced exceptional levels of oppression involving the destruction of several thousand villages. They also have an indisputable claim to be one of the Middle East’s most ‘indigenous’ peoples, in a sea of conflicting such claims, and however one interprets their ancestry among Indo-Aryan speaking peoples who lived in the area in ancient times. This has created significant links with indigenous peoples throughout the continent of America, for example, with Spanish translations of Öcalan’s books circulating in Latin American countries. Öcalan’s ability to thread together world systems analysis with an indigenous perspective from the Middle East that one rarely hears, relating the present to a sense of continuity with the world’s oldest known civilizations, is unique.

The suppression of the ancient Kurdish language in schools and other public spaces has been particularly significant. Leyla Zana, one of the best loved Kurdish leaders, made history as the first Kurdish woman MP to take her seat in Turkey’s Parliament in 1991. She has since spent many years in jail, like thousands of other Kurdish and Turkish citizens of Turkey, many of whom have used this experience to exemplary effect, like Öcalan. One of her main ‘crimes’ was that she spoke in Kurdish on the occasion when she took her oath to the state on first entering Parliament, which was illegal at that time. In fact, she took the oath in Turkish, except for the last sentence, which she spoke in Kurdish: ‘I take this oath for the brotherhood between the Turkish people and the Kurdish people’.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> See Vinay Lal, ‘Gandhi’s West, the West’s Gandhi’, *New Literary History*, Vol. 40 no. 2. *India and The West*, spring 2009, p. 281. There seems to be no authentic record of the exchange, which may be apocryphal, though it captures the spirit of one of Gandhi’s key themes, set out, for example, in his *Hind Swaraj* (1909), a critique of modernity and of the uncritical acceptance of Western modernity.

<sup>24</sup> Kirsch 2018, *Engaged Anthropology: Politics Beyond the Text*, Oakland CA, University of California Press.

<sup>25</sup> ‘Leyla Zana’, Soyent Communications, 2014, at <http://www.nndb.com/people/691/000134289/>. See also her biography in the Peace in Kurdistan Project, at <https://peaceinkurdistancampaign.com/resources/leyla-zana/leyla-zana-biography/>

## BOOK REVIEWS

**R. DARNELL, M. HAMILTON, R.L.A. HANCOCK and J. SMITH** (eds.), *The Franz Boas Papers, Volume 1: Franz Boas as Public Intellectual—Theory, Ethnography, Activism* (Vol. 1). Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press 2015, xxvi + 381pp., \$75. ISBN 978-0-80327-1-999.

Despite what its title, *The Franz Boas Papers*, might imply within the usual archivist terminology, these new pages are neither texts nor archives by Franz Boas (1858-1942) himself, but fifteen recent, specifically commissioned essays about his oeuvre. These papers were selected from a conference that took place in Canada, with funding provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) (ix). All four co-editors are based in English-Canadian universities, Regna Darnell being Professor of Anthropology and the Co-director of the First Nations Studies Program at the University of Western Ontario in London, Canada. The unclassifiable Franz Boas needs no introduction among anthropologists; he is presented by Michelle Hamilton as ‘the father of American anthropology’ (345) and in Regna Darnell’s opening chapter as ‘indisputably the founder and dominant figure in the emergence of a professional discipline in North America’ (xi). In the book’s third section, Julia Liss suggests we ‘consider Boas as a public intellectual, a “citizen-scientist” whose contemporary and historical importance come from outside the profession no less than from within it’ (293).

Situating Boas can sometimes be challenging or repetitive, so nowadays anthropologists have to be specific and precise highlighting the ways in which Boas’s contributions were so distinctive. In Chapter 1, co-editor Regna Darnell reminds us that Boas’s own conception of ‘anthropology took for granted a symbolic rather than material definition of culture, a text-based approach to cultural knowledge through the recorded words of members of culture, and the inextricability of language, thought, and reality (i.e., the external world)’ (4). *Franz Boas as Public Intellectual—Theory, Ethnography, Activism* comes in four parts: ‘Theory’, ‘Ethnography’, ‘Activism’ and ‘Archives’. In order to contextualize the volume within wider Boas scholarship, American anthropology and indigenous/Native American studies, this review will — admittedly unfairly — focus on just a few of its chapters.

In the section dedicated to ‘Theory’, many contributors, like Christopher Bracken, rightly point out Boas’s innovative ways of reasoning and his particular use of comparative methods,

for example, when observing similarities between lifestyles such as dances in different, separate, sometimes remote groups. The spontaneous temptation would have been to affirm straightforwardly, just like Edward Burnett Tylor (1832-1917) did at the end of the nineteenth century in his famous book *Primitive Culture* (1871), that these same cultural practices prove the existence of some kind of link between two selected communities with similar activities; but Boas contradicts that too-easy reflex when writing about what he coined ‘the Indians of the North Pacific Coast’ (55): ‘We cannot say that the occurrence of the same phenomena is always due to the same causes’ (Boas, quoted by Christopher Bracken, 55). Bracken explains that, instead of the tropological wager, Boas relied on metonymy when studying ‘The Growth of Indians’ Mythologies’ (55).

Typically each chapter in *Franz Boas as Public Intellectual—Theory, Ethnography, Activism* (like Chapter 6 on ‘The Boasian Legacy in Ethnomusicology’, by Sean O’Neill) focuses on one specific subdiscipline, for example, ethnomusicology and the studying of indigenous music, plus a selected place for fieldwork (in this case Boas’s 1883 sojourn with the Inuit on Baffin Island, 132), and then actualizes Boas’s research to re-inscribe its core elements into our current theoretical schemes and concepts, such as narratives, holism and cultural relativism, which were not used as such by Boas (p. 129). The interdisciplinary scope characterizes the most interesting contributions in this volume. As Sean O’Neill notes in his extensive endnote 46, the great anthropologists were not narrow-minded or exclusively focused on their own fields, as they were able to think and work outside the disciplinary limits of the social sciences:

Given that Sapir, Boas, and Lévi-Strauss all dedicated much of their private lives to their musical interests, it may be no accident that these scholars were all gifted generalists in their professional lives, able to make comparisons and see connections across a wide range of issues within the field. Music, in other words, may have primed not only their ears for language but also their brains for holistic, comparative thinking. (Sean O’Neill, endnote 46, p. 151)

Most of the contributions in the second section on ‘Ethnography’ focus on indigenous peoples like the Thompson Indians of British Columbia, referring to a milestone publication of Boas’s in 1900<sup>1</sup> (see Chapter 8, by Andréa Laforêt, 191ff., but also Chapter 10, by Robert Hancock, 237ff.). Unfortunately there is no recapitulation chapter. The final pages by Michelle Hamilton present the revitalizing idea of ‘The Franz Boas Papers Documentary Edition Project’, made possible through advances in the digital humanities (‘the duality of digital repatriation’) for archiving, cross-referencing and future research (345). The

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<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs of the American Museum of Natural History*, vol. 2 part 4.

importance of this initiative is highlighted by Hamilton, who reminds academics how Boas was redefined as an Americanist by US scholars, who thereby neglected his work in Canadian regions. Referring to ‘the Canadian contributions and legacies of Boas’ (346), Hamilton notes that Boas has ‘been relatively ignored by scholars who view him exclusively as an Americanist, narrowly defined’ (346). However, if this archive project, which is partly being funded with federal money, aims to be truly Canadian, it will have to add a much-needed French dimension, which seems, at this moment, totally absent from its contents or bibliographical sources. This should have been done long ago, and it is odd that no one has noticed this lack of a Francophone presence so far in this project, despite its international ambitions.

Potential readers of *Franz Boas as Public Intellectual—Theory, Ethnography, Activism* have to be familiar already with the history of anthropology, as some contributors do not always explain every element and actor; for example, in Chapter 11, by Joshua Smith, the reference to sociologist John Collier (1884-1968), who worked as ‘the Commissioner for the Bureau of Indian Affairs from 1933 to 1945’ (263), does not even indicate whether he was affiliated to the US or the Canadian government (263). Any author’s standpoint matters and can have unexpected consequences. Here, we do not even get Collier’s years of birth and death, not even in the chapter’s endnotes (275).

Even after a second reading, this reader is still left with a nagging question regarding readership: should one begin with Boas’s own writings or with this brand-new collection of new essays about his works and his contribution to anthropology? Depending on the reader, two opposite answers are possible: for the newcomer, Franz Boas himself cannot be replaced by anyone or any book, but anthropologists already familiar with Boas’ works will find here a reassessment and reconsideration of his writings and, more importantly, of his unique world view and methodological approach. Not really a book for public libraries or undergraduates, *Franz Boas as Public Intellectual—Theory, Ethnography, Activism* will be of interest to scholars in the history of anthropology, Canadian anthropology and/or Native Studies who already have an interest in Franz Boas.

At the time of writing this review, it appears that no second volume is being planned for 2019 by the University of Nebraska Press.

Reviewed by YVES LABERGE

University of Ottawa, Canada; email ylaberge@uottowa.ca

**D.S. FARRER** (ed.), *War magic: religion, sorcery, and performance*, New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books 2016, x, 170 pp. ISBN 978-1-78533-329-3.

This book was originally published as a special issue of the journal *Social Analysis* (Volume 58, issue 1). The authors of these chapters discuss aspects of war magic, a form of magic used to harm or heal (D.S. Farrer, p. 1), in different societies. The authors come from different backgrounds, so the interdisciplinary approach enriches the understanding of these phenomena. In the first chapter, Margaret Chan employs theatre studies to interpret demon-killing exorcists in Singapore. The following two chapters are based on ethnographic research. In Chapter 2 Jean-Marc de Grave describes initiation rituals in a Javanese secret society. In Chapter 3, David Nidel examines black magic in highland Jambi, Sumatra. Chapter 4 offers a different perspective on war magic. Using a historiographic approach, Michael Roberts describes how religion empowered the role of the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka. Ethnographic methodology returns for the following two chapters. In Chapter 5, Željko Jokić describes the shamanic powers of the *shapori* among the Yanomami of Venezuela. In Chapter 6, D.S. Farrer combines three years of ethnographic research with James D. Sellmann's investigations into ancient Chamorro philosophy to explain their use of magical chants. Finally, in Chapter 7, Iain Sinclair discusses war magic among tantric Buddhists in India. In the following paragraphs, I will highlight the features of some of these chapters.

Chan's chapter focuses on *tangki* worship in the Singapore Chinese diaspora. In these rituals, warrior gods become possessed by a spirit to avoid evil. These spirit mediums protect their communities, and they can also change people's luck or cure illnesses. For Chan, there is a strong relationship between medicine and exorcisms in traditional China: both share the ideograph 医, *yi*, which in contemporary Chinese means 'physician'. This ideogram is also present in traditional Chinese 醫, but in combination with the ideogram 巫, *wū*, which means 'female sorcerer' (Chan, pp. 31-32). Self-mortification is an important aspect of *tangki* rituals: by doing damage to the self, the performer demonstrates his or her invulnerability in confronting these evil spirits.

Robert's research presents an interesting syncretism between tantric rites and the Tamil Tigers, insurgents of Sri Lanka. In these processes, devotees seek to embody a divine figure that he or she is conciliating. This fusion hopefully provides benevolent protection during confrontations with other forces. In this chapter, Robert compares *kuppi*, self-sacrifice to defend one's comrades, among Tamil Tigers, and the *thāli*, a turmeric-stained string tied around a wife's neck signifying the permanent bond of a marriage among the Tamil. For him,

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the two actions are similar (Robert, pp. 94-6) because both reveal a permanent bond. He considers them ‘rites of encompassing protection’, which reveals the power of encirclement. The devotee looking to be embodied in the divine figure is also part of a rite of encirclement.

The two-year ethnographic fieldwork of Jokić in Yanomami (Yanomaman) territory offers some examples of the use of *hekura*, spirit-helpers, to manipulate suffering and to kill their enemies (Jokić, p. 109). *Shapori*, Yanomami shamans, may be motivated to commit a violent act as vengeance for a previous assault. They can also compel such attacks in competition with other *shapori* in a ‘perpetual retaliatory revenge’ (Jokić, p. 120). For Jokić, these assaults also reveal how contact has produced historical change among Yanomami communities over time. It is also interesting to note how Yanomami are presented in this chapter. Jokić discusses their reputation as a primitive group among missionaries in the 1950s (Jokić, p. 108) and their characterization by earlier anthropologists as a fierce, violent, drug-ridden people. Such characterizations were also commonly made of other Amazonian communities in Brazil, Colombia or Peru.

Reviewed by ANDRÉS NAPURÍ

M.Sc. student in Social Anthropology, Institute for Social and Cultural Anthropology, School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography, University of Oxford, 64 Banbury Road, Oxford OX2 6PN. E-mail: [andres.napuri@anthro.ox.ac.uk](mailto:andres.napuri@anthro.ox.ac.uk)

**DIDIER GAZAGNADOU**, *The diffusion of a postal relay system in premodern Eurasia*, Paris: Editions Kimé 2016, 187 pp. ISBN 978-2-8417-4777-1.

In this work, Didier Gazagnadou offers a comprehensive account of the diffusion of the medieval postal relay system during the thirteenth century. This system consisted of postal relay stations placed strategically throughout territories controlled by a centralized state to allow the efficient transmission of information through these stations by the state. According to Gazagnadou, this is what allowed empires to maintain and enforce their authority over their territories, and they formed an integral part of the medieval state apparatus, a ‘technique of power’, to borrow Michel Foucault’s concept, for the state during this period.

Gazagnadou traces the origins of the postal relay system to ancient China, where, because of the need for a centralized state to govern a large territory, a precise system for the transmission of information over great distances was developed. This system, Gazagnadou argues, was then adopted by the Mongols when they invaded China and subsequently brought to the Islamic Middle East by the Mongols when they invaded that region as well. It was

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there that Milanese traders were exposed to this particular postal relay system. They then brought the idea back to Europe, where it was adopted by governments in France and Italy. Thus Gazagnadou argues that the postal relay system was diffused during the thirteenth century, while noting how the system developed and changed as it spread. For instance, in Europe it began to have a private function, allowing individuals to send messages in exchange for money akin to the modern postal service, while in China it was to be used purely for state purposes.

Thus, Gazagnadou offers an alternative interpretation of the formation of the state across different contexts, arguing against a 'pure identity' (i.e. formations being the result of internal developments without external influence) by illustrating how state formations are the result of cross-cultural influences and processes of diffusion. He also makes the point that the diffusion of state postal relay systems marked the beginning of the formation of the modern 'subject', again borrowing from Foucault, as it allowed the state to govern the individual through its access to and the dissemination of information.

While Gazagnadou makes a convincing case for the diffusion of the postal relay system, his analysis of it stops there. His argument that the system sowed the seeds for the making of the modern state subject could have been bolstered by a detailed discussion of the implications of the spread of the system, as well as by looking at what kind of information was disseminated and for what purposes, rather than assuming that it serves the function of ensuring state hegemony. Nevertheless, *The diffusion of a postal relay system in premodern Eurasia* is definitely an interesting read for anyone interested in a prime example of the diffusionist perspective and/or in premodern systems of the dissemination of information.

Reviewed by MICAH TAN

MPhil candidate in Social Anthropology, Institute for Social and Cultural Anthropology, School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography, University of Oxford, 64 Banbury Road, Oxford OX2 6PN. E-mail: [micah.tan@anthro.ox.ac.uk](mailto:micah.tan@anthro.ox.ac.uk)

**JANE I. GUYER**, *Legacies, logics, logistics: essays in the anthropology of the platform economy*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press 2016, 320 pp. ISBN: 978-0-22632-6-870.

Jane I. Guyer's latest book, *Legacies, logics, logistics*, draws together a collection of previously unpublished essays, advancing a number of aspects of her decades-long research into economic life in West Africa. The twelve chapters are divided into five thematic parts:

‘Foundations,’ ‘Public economic cultures,’ ‘Cultures of calculation,’ ‘Platforms’ and ‘Toward ethnography and the people’s economies’. Though the scope is broad, the references numerous, Guyer beautifully folds in (or ‘entangles’, to use vocabulary adopted by Guyer from Michel Callon) a complicated scholarship, including the anthropologies of finance, risk, temporality, modernity and ontology, while bouncing back and forth in relation to her own work.

Pivoting around *Prophecy and the near future* (2007) and Guyer’s seminal work, *Marginal gains* (2004), Chapters four and six are dedicated respectively to modalities of reasoning, and calculative practices and ordinality. I single out these chapters in order to suggest an alternative reading of *Legacies, logics, logistics*. Admittedly a brilliant ethnography of economic life in its own right (yet also unconventional), the reader familiar with Guyer’s previous writings might recognize a parallel current running through the collection. In the 2007 special edition of the *African Studies Review*, on the theme of *Marginal gains*, historian and philosopher Helen Verran reads the work of two theorists through the lens of the book and subsequently disentangles two different modes of reasoning at play in the anthropology of markets and value: Paul Mirowski’s ‘foundational empiricism’, whose work inspired Guyer’s analysis in *Marginal gains*;<sup>2</sup> and Michel Callon’s ‘relational empiricism’, to whom Guyer claims partial allegiance in *Legacies, logics, logistics*.<sup>3</sup> Part I, ‘Foundation’, is dedicated to this analytical move, where Guyer’s own intellectual drift towards Callon et al.’s Economic Actor Network Theory (ANT)<sup>4</sup> and her extended reflections on relational empiricism<sup>5</sup> and other ontological conundrums are outlined. Read as such, *Legacies, logics, logistics* becomes a sort of re-kindling, as Verran writes; Callon had already ‘entered through the back door’ (2007: 174), and it was only necessary for past insights to link up with new ones to make it all seem sense.

By picking up on some of the key concepts on which Callon et al.’s theory is premised, Guyer critically unpacks the ontological groundings upon which the ANT scholars conceptualize the assemblage of ‘elements’ through which the market economy is performed. As the title suggests, Guyer maps out the *legacies* (people, institutions, temporalities), the

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<sup>2</sup> Where the question regarding Guyer’s conceptualization of ‘institutions’ is the critical point.

<sup>3</sup> For those particularly interested in the performativity of local and global markets, it might be productive to read Verran alongside Guyer for an exciting exploration of the ‘modal reasoning’ of West African numbering systems and the ontology of ordinality (see *Science and an African logic*, Verran 2001).

<sup>4</sup> John Law and Bruno Latour are often associated with this scholarship. The Economy ANT scholars whom Guyer refers to cover a more extensive network.

<sup>5</sup> ‘Relational empiricism’ is a term Verran introduce in *Science and an African logic*. For a further discussion, see Martha Kenney’s 2015 article, *Counting, accounting, and accountability: Helen Verran’s relational empiricism*,

*logics* (ideological and theoretical mechanisms) and the *logistics* through which it all works. Here, the platform allegory (or ‘the platform economy’, to cite the book’s subtitle) becomes a ‘replacement for the ideological “market economy” of neoliberalism’ (4). As such the platform has rhizomatic qualities, sometimes bundled together as localized structures,<sup>6</sup> yet they are also part of an interconnected network that is contingent on legacies, logics and logistics, and that works through different ‘devices’.<sup>7</sup> Reconceptualized as the ‘platform’, Guyer brings precision to ANT’s ‘assemblage’ and offers an analytical tool to work with. Chapter 5, ‘From market to platform’, goes more deeply into Guyer’s reading of the contemporary economic regime and elaborates on the use of the platform as a tool with which to understand the multiple and hybrid devices through which ‘the market’ works.

One aspect of the platform metaphor I especially appreciate is Guyer’s evocation of its infrastructural features. These need constant maintenance, repair and upgrading, being ever wide open to hacking, intrusions, incremental interventions and ‘toiling ingenuity’. Like another recent book on market performativity, by Veronica Gago (2017), Guyer’s platform does not have an autonomous externality, but is something enacted, reproduced and remixed in a myriad of different moves and modes. In doing so, Guyer traces emergent human and non-human agencies in Callon’s assemblage of horizontal elements that are just ‘lying around’ (27).

In the steady stream of new exciting literature on the anthropology of value and markets, Guyer calls for meticulousness, for historicizing, and, as in *Marginal gains*, for taking political economy seriously. The last chapter raises a timely question: ‘What is “real” about the “real economy?”’<sup>8</sup> It concludes with a resolutely anti-essentialist critique of how economic life is often imagined.

*Legacies, logics, logistics* is not an easy read. It brings together the body of scholarship on ANT that has invested itself in economic theory, and provokes the reader to up the pace with Guyer and become familiar with an array of references, meta-discussions, concepts and ideas that the collection puts forward at a breakneck speed. It does not matter whether it is read in chronological order, as the book is structured, or alternatively read randomly – the

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<sup>6</sup> See Nick Srnicek’s *Platform capitalism* (2016) for examples of a particular kind of globalized platform economy.

<sup>7</sup> Together with the concept of ‘economization’/‘marketization’, the ‘market device’ is a central idea in Guyer’s collection that could be contributed Callon’s *oeuvre*. Çalışkan and Callon use ‘economization’ in a general sense to describe the assembly of actions and devices as ‘economic’. (Çalışkan and Callon 2009; Callon, Millo and Muniesa 2007).

<sup>8</sup> For an extensive discussion, see *Hau* 2017, 7(3), which include a special section on the real economy, edited by Federico Neiburg and Jane I. Guyer.

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reader should just grab and hold on to whatever one can. Further, reading Verran alongside Guyer, as this reviewer did, invokes the feeling of listening in on a friendly yet advanced discussion, where the provisional conclusions have found their way into the essays and bear witness of the creative intellectual process behind the writing of the collection. *Legacies, logics, logistics* makes an acute call for anthropologists to engage in an extended discussion regarding the workings of the economy, which few do better than Jane I. Guyer.

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Reviewed by IRMELIN JOELSSON

DPhil candidate, Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology and St Cross College, University of Oxford.

Email: irmelin.joelsson@anthro.ox.ac.uk

**MALGORZATA IREK**, *Travelling with the Argonauts: informal networks seen without a vertical lens*, New York etc.: Berghahn 2018, 226 pp. ISBN 978-1-78533-898-4.

This book, written by Małgorzata Irek, an experienced Polish researcher who has conducted fieldwork in her chosen sphere for some thirty years, is quite unique in its design of introducing a new approach to researching informal networks, and in fact all the informal phenomena that make up the world in which we live. In her introduction to the book, Irek

explains the limitations of all other approaches in respect of their verticality, dualism or space-boundedness. In presenting her own approach, which she calls the Restricted Verticality Perspective (RVP), she tries to take the strong points from other researchers' work, where she is inspired by Nietzschean horizontality, Norbert Elias's notion of *homo apertus* and Bruno Latour's Actor Network Theory, among others. Irek is very precise in showing us the limitations of all the previous theories, and her own approach aims for something truly grandiose and ambitious, where the layer of the social phenomena being examined would be researched 'across' space rather than in a single location, would be 'flattened' to try and limit the verticality inherent in our perception of the world, would be inclusive and non-dualistic, avoiding distinctions into formal and informal, and would be free of a priori hypotheses and intellectual embeddedness in previous theories. This endeavour is quite unique and teaches the reader to develop critical thinking in evaluating all previous theories researching social phenomena – in a way, Irek is aiming at the impossible goal of bringing the researcher as close as possible to life as it is experienced. By doing so, she enters into another set of debates about the position of the ethnographer vis-à-vis his or her subjects, and it is by investigating the necessary balance of distance and empathy that her presentation of the application of RVP begins.

Irek structures her book in a quite innovative way, deliberately avoiding any chronological presentation of her fieldwork, which was conducted in the 1970s and 1980s. Instead she divides her book into chapters in accordance with her own intellectual journey, which has consisted in realizing how to research informal networks and in learning through her own errors. Thus, in all subsequent chapters Irek is always present as a researcher and presents her case studies as steps in her journey in understanding how to apply RVP to research on social networks. This perspective creates the only problem that seems to exist with this book – the reader never acquires an opportunity to become fully immersed in the wealth of ethnographic material that Irek has collected, as the book always draws us back to a theoretical discussion of how the informality of human activities should be researched. Even for a reader acquainted with the realities of lives in the countries of the Eastern bloc the jumps in the presentation of the material are sometimes hard to follow, and one regrets not knowing more about the many cases presented. On the other hand, Irek compensates for this by being very logical in presenting her approach, the Restricted Verticality Perspective, and for this goal alone sacrifices the possibility to make her book a fully-fledged ethnography.

The book is divided into six chapters, but it eschews the usual conclusion, replacing it instead with an afterword, a decision in line with her wish to avoid embeddedness in the

history of previous research and her refusal to return to vertical thinking in her own book. Her chapters trace her intellectual journey, not in linear fashion, but presenting ethnographic cases all taken from her ethnographic fieldwork undertaken in 1970s and 1980s in different European countries where she followed the informal activities of Polish travellers. Germany is a crucial location for *Travelling with Argonauts*, but Bulgaria, Romania, the Soviet Union, Turkey and the UK are also included. The case studies are truly kaleidoscopic in making the reader acquainted with men and women who created 'egocentric' (as Irek calls them) informal networks spontaneously in order to earn money for themselves and their families by engaging in selling and buying goods, transporting them across Europe, construction, cleaning, sexual services, working as seamstresses, etc.

Chapter 2 discusses the limitations of formal methods in approaching research participants, and Irek is very honest in talking about the mistakes she initially made in trying to conduct formal interviews on trains and in shop queues and in positioning herself as superior to her subjects. She arrives at a very humanist viewpoint of never building hierarchies and always positions herself like one of her subjects by becoming involved in their activities, trying to be helpful to them in order to meet new people and become 'one of them', and making notes only retrospectively, without anyone noticing (usually in the toilets). Irek also discusses ethical points here, trying to draw our attention to the difference between sympathy and empathy, and bringing to the light the dangers the researcher him- or herself is subjected to in researching informal activities. Thus, Chapter 3 indeed shows the results of the researcher exiting the emic-etic logic and becoming involved with the lives of her participants that very often involved developing tolerance, humility, and physical and psychological strength, as the conditions of fieldwork involved travelling on crowded trains, sleeping over at new acquaintances' apartments and listening to their sometimes very gruesome stories (especially those of prostitutes).

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 describe the components that are important for RVP, that is, a way to think beyond sectors and not make distinctions between formal and informal when researching networks (Chapter 4), a method that escapes a particular locality when researching informal activities (Chapter 5), and a perspective that pinpoints the interfaces between formal and informal and finds them in the actors themselves (Chapter 6). In Chapter 4 Irek engagingly shows how many actors from various employment sectors and occupations create networks where it is hard to tell who belongs to the informal and who to the formal sector of economy, with the same people often being involved in both. In Chapter 5 Irek makes a strong case for site-less ethnography (instead of multi-sited, as suggested by

researchers in a volume edited by Falzon (2009)) by describing interesting cases where the activities were literally impossible to tie to a particular location, as they involved constant travelling between various countries, often becoming a journey of self-discovery, escapism from restrictions of social expectations or simple pleasure, rather than just an economic activity. Irek looks for a fruitful synthesis of the social, personal and economic in presenting the reasons that drive people forward on their journeys.

Chapter 6 finalizes Irek's search for a theory by presenting an equivalent of Malinowski's *kula* ring – a 'Koło' route where goods are bought in particular European countries to be re-sold in others, while these others become the sources of other valuable objects that could be sold in new destinations. Irek fascinatingly shows how much knowledge, social skills and experience participating even in one full route requires, and it is here that she presents her subjects as examples of Norbert Elias's *homo apertus*, who make new connections as they go. This chapter seems to hold out the potential for a whole ethnography, and this is where I regretted the disjointed character of particular case studies the most. It seems to me that in this chapter Irek ceases to position herself as a researcher among her participants, thus making it unclear how she found information about all the travellers mentioned in this chapter, as she uses the objective mode of presentation of information, which is different from that she has used in previous chapters. The humanist dimension of the book nonetheless strikes the reader of *Travelling with the Argonauts*, as Irek aims not only at enabling us to research informal networks and phenomena, but also at teaching us to dismiss our vertical and hierarchical thinking in approaching the everyday lives of human beings, and thus become more human ourselves. This strong moral stance underpins Irek's writing, being an additional layer of potential influence on the reader, thus overcoming one more dichotomy, that between our intellectual and professional versus our personal and emotional involvement with the book.

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Reviewed by YULIA SAVIKOVSKAYA

DPhil in Social and Cultural Anthropology, Merton College and School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography (University of Oxford), 51 Banbury Road, Oxford OX2 6PE. E-mail: yulia.savikovskaya@anthro.ox.ac.uk

**BRUNO LATOUR**, *Down to earth: politics in the new climactic regime*, Cambridge: Polity Press 2018, X, 128 pp. ISBN: 978-1-50953-057-1 (p/b).

Bruno Latour is an influential social theorist and STS (Science and Technology Studies) scholar. In the seminal work *Laboratory life: the social construction of scientific facts* (published in 1979, with Steve Woolgar) he reveals how the practice of science-making is contingent on social values, human decisions, and the strength and design of institutions in which science is produced. A recent feature in the *New York Times Magazine*, headlined ‘Bruno Latour, the post-truth philosopher, mounts a defense of science’, describes how Latour’s work has been co-opted by anti-science thinkers in order to cast doubt on the objectivity of scientists and the veracity of facts. Of course, Latour cannot be held accountable for the current post-truth era; as Beck, Giddens and Lash write (1994), this is in part a problem of ‘reflexive modernity’, science having become ‘the unwilling target of its methodological scepticism’.

Nonetheless, it is perhaps with this criticism in mind that Latour has turned his attention in the last two decades to the issue of climate change, an early casualty of the post-truth war on science (Krugman 2018). In *Down to earth: politics in the new climactic regime*, Latour makes the case for why we are no longer living in the ‘common world’ and provides a prescription for how to move forward (which, given how few answers are offered up in climate change discourses, is refreshing in itself). He isolates the 1990s as a turning-point when the ‘ruling classes’, realizing the Earth’s ecological constraints, stopped believing in the limitless potential of progress and modernity and started ‘sheltering themselves’ from the rest (it could be argued that this began much sooner, in response to Malthus, Schumacher and the Club of Rome). He draws his evidence from three trends: deregulation, the ‘explosion of inequality’ and the ‘systematic denial of climate change’. Latour argues that, in order to understand the history that led to today’s populism, we must place climate change and climate denialism ‘front and centre’.

Latour sets out trajectories of history by means of schematic renderings of ‘worlds’. The first vector he draws is between ‘Local’ and ‘Global’ worlds. He explains how people are torn today between these ‘two contradictory injunctions’: to modernize (Global), or to remain in their native province, retain their habits and live in the quiet of their ‘old certainties’ (Local) (27). Next, Latour places arrows representing Left and Right political orientations, which go in different directions depending on the issue (regarding the Market, the Left wants to slow down, towards the Local; on the issue of ‘liberation of morals,’ the Left wants to

accelerate, towards Global; the Right does the opposite). This schematic is then complicated by the addition of ‘Globalization-plus’ (multiple viewpoints and ‘modes of being’) and ‘Globalization-minus’ (‘a single vision’, imposed on everyone and representing a small number of interests) (13).

This severe polarization between Local and Global leaves no common ground; it represents the ‘brutalization of politics’. We cannot move back to the ‘ideal past’, as the Local has become a ‘retrospective invention’, a ‘rump territory’. Nor can we accelerate forward towards a limitless Globe given the current situation of our ‘shrinking world’ marked by a scarcity of resources and inhabitable land, the result of climate change (see McKibben 2018). We all feel the threat of dispossession and the existential anxiety of being uprooted. In this time of precarious transition (cf. Tsing 2015), Latour asks, ‘How can we find a place?’ (16).

Before Latour can prescribe his own solution, he must explain the current Trumpist reaction, which he calls ‘Out of this World’. In Trumpism, ‘the State is in disgrace, the individual is king, and the urgent governmental priority is to gain time by loosening all constraints, before the population at large notices that there is no world corresponding to the America depicted’ (35). Latour lays the blame here on the ‘obscurantist elites’ who knew the world was in trouble but decided to conceal it from the rest (hence climate denialism). Trumpism is typified by the U.S.’s withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, which was akin to a ‘declaration of war authorizing the occupation of all other countries, if not with troops then with CO<sub>2</sub>, which the U.S. retains the right to emit’ (84). Latour labels this denial of reality ‘post-politics’, a ‘rejection of the world that it claims to inhabit’ (38). Latour also lays blame on science and the ‘Moderns’ for our current predicament in so far as they ejected us (humans) from Nature; our historical (Western) rendering of ‘nature-as-universe’, ‘a Galilean object’, allowed us to treat nature as a ‘resource to exploit’. (77). He takes aim at the ‘Greens’ for framing the political stakes as a choice between society and ecology (ecology to be left alone).

With the above ‘worlds’ in mind, what is the alternative? We can either continue to ‘nourish dreams of escaping’ or we can start to ‘seek a territory that we and our children can inhabit’, that is, ‘look for a place to land’ (5). Latour’s solution is the ‘Terrestrial,’ an ‘earthbound solution’. The Terrestrial, no longer a terra incognita but a world heavily occupied and at its limit, requires us to rethink what ‘belonging to the land’ could mean. He articulates our need to re-orient ourselves toward ‘nature-as-process’, wherein living beings are ‘agents participating fully in the process of generating the chemical, and even geological

conditions of the planet' (he uses the example of our breath contributing to the make-up of air) (75). This 'redistribution' of agencies requires us to break down the walls that separate organisms from environment, subject from object, and to view them instead as 'co-productions' of one another (76) (see also Latour 2014). Perhaps more useful than 'Terrestrial' (which, to my mind, is hard to distinguish from Earth, and is also evocative of 'territory,' with its artificial delineations and possessive quality) is the notion of a 'Compositionist' world (articulated in Latour 2014) that sees the process of human development as one of 'becoming ever-more attached to Nature, and intimate with, a panoply of nonhuman natures'.

Finally, Latour lay out his ideal 'dwelling place' in the Terrestrial world as Europe, with the model of the European Union as a potential 'institutional embodiment' of the 'New Climatic Regime'. He believes that the EU's ability to superimpose and overlap different national interests and its intricacy of regulation are akin to an 'ecosystem', 'showing us the way' and 'offering an example of what it means to rediscover inhabitable ground' (101).

*Down to earth* is an ambitious, complex and compelling political call-to-arms to take back the future from those who wish to squander it. Latour's central enemy, climate change denialists, are symbolic of the old guard clinging to their privileges, attempting to make their escape (from the 'common world') before the Revolution. On the point of these 'obscurantist elites', whom Latour accuses of promulgating a billion-dollar disinformation campaign to cast doubt on anthropogenically caused climate change (he cites Oreskes and Conway 2010, and Hoggan 2009), Latour could have done more to distribute blame (the way he distributes agency!), particularly at the structural level. Without diminishing the fault of the elites (likely a mix of outright deception and willful ignorance), one can also point to humanity's technological hubris (we can solve anything!), the lack of 'care' we've shown our 'Monsters'/inventions (Latour 2011), and, importantly, to the power of the Market (see Moore 2017, Klein 2014) as likewise culpable for the current climactic predicament and humanity's inadequate response.

*Down to earth* is an apt title for Latour's political task at hand: to push us to face reality (the world is ecologically constrained, limitless progress is no more) and to recapture (from the nativists) what 'back to the land' can mean (in the form of the Terrestrial). But what of the 'New Climatic Regime'? First, one needs to retrieve its definition from a previous book: it is 'the present situation in which the physical framework that the Moderns had taken for granted, the ground on which their history has always played out, has become unstable' (Latour 2017). The 'New Climatic Regime' thus breathes agency into a previously taken-for-

granted inert object—the ground. Amidst a crowded field of terms to describe the climactic condition (from Latour himself, ‘Terrestrial’, ‘dwelling place’; to other scholars, ‘the Anthropocene’, ‘the great acceleration’, etc.), perhaps the value of ‘the New Climactic Regime’ as a conceptual framework is in its emphasis: unlike the ‘Anthropocene’, which empowers humans as geological agents, the ‘New Climactic Regime’ privileges the Earth’s agency to strike back. This might be useful in humbling us to recognize the limits of our control.

Latour situates climate change, and the constrained Earth it implies, as the preeminent threat to humanity and thus the central axis around which all other political issues should rotate. Granting climate change such centrality is useful in elevating its urgency, in articulating its wider social implications (particularly related to migration and inequality, which Latour does very well) and in tying the fate of Society/Nature back together again. But this is not without drawbacks. In the U.S., the politicization of climate change has converted it from a scientific object into a political subject, a matter of opinion and identity (see Kahan 2014). Latour’s prescription, which requires a further merging of ecological and social agendas, may lead to the end of ‘climate change’ as a contained entity, as it dissolves instead into a catch-all for the world’s many problems. Latour has likely considered this, and perhaps determined that we’ve come too far along this post-truth course, making it futile now to attempt to depoliticize or re-objectify climate change. His proposition, namely to mimic ecosystems’ complex networks and distributed agencies via a European Union-like model, is perhaps our only hope.

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Reviewed by KIMBERLY SCHOEMAKER

MPhil student in Social Anthropology, School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography, University of Oxford, 64 Banbury Road, Oxford OX2 6PN. E-mail: [kimberly.schoemaker@linacre.ox.ac.uk](mailto:kimberly.schoemaker@linacre.ox.ac.uk)

**JEANNETTE MAGEO** and **ELFRIEDE HERMANN** (eds.), *Mimesis and Pacific transcultural encounters: making likenesses in time, trade and ritual reconfigurations*, New York and Oxford: Berghahn 2017, 278 pp. ISBN 978-1-78533-624-9.

This volume is a collection of eleven chapters looking at mimesis during transcultural encounters in the Pacific Islands. The chapters are organized under three topics: time, trade and ritual. Although each chapter focuses on a different part of the Pacific Islands and a specific ethnographic setting, they more or less all argue against Darwin's identification of mimicry as an inferior or 'primitive' form of mentality among indigenous people.

In the introductory chapter, instances of mimesis are theoretically classified into three categories. First, incorporative mimesis is a way of incorporating another culture. Secondly, emblemizing mimesis means emblemizing one's own culture in order to distinguish it from others. Lastly, abject mimesis means subordinating oneself in deference to another dominant culture. All the chapters provide evidence supporting the presence of either the incorporative or the emblemizing form of mimesis, or a mixture of both. The book suggests that, unlike in

some South Asian and African societies, where abject mimesis can be witnessed, on the Pacific Islands this kind of deferential mimicry has generally been avoided. As such, while the book's subtitle, *Making likenesses in time, trade and ritual reconfigurations*, implies that the book is about practices of mimicry in different areas of life on the Pacific Islands, it also hints that such examples of mimesis are similar in form, that is, either incorporative or emblemizing, or a mixture of both.

Overall, the chapters in the book suggest that mimesis during transcultural encounters on the Pacific Islands is in fact a mode of communication and bridge-building between two groups of people who do not share a language or background. The book urges readers to look beyond the otherwise unequal power relationships embedded in colonial thinking, which treat westerners as the more superior beings, and that therefore indigenous people want to mimic their behaviour and become one of them. However, indigenous people may perform mimicry in order to engage with or please their peers in their own culture rather than westerners (see, for example, Francesca Merlan on early Australian encounters in Chapter 1). In one of Jeanette Mageo's chapters (Chapter 2), it is shown that, while European art motifs were incorporated into Samoan dress, the latter might also have reworked German art motifs, as Germans dressed in Samoan dress too. Also, in Joyce D. Hammond's chapter (Chapter 4), we are shown that it is westerners who wish to try out and therefore mimic the traditional Tahitian wedding in order to fulfil their desire for an exotic and romantic experience which they cannot find in their home countries. What is more, mimesis should not be seen as a direct replica of the original (see Laurence Marshall Carucci's mimetic example on utterances in Chapter 8). Instead it is an innovative process of reconfiguring one's present cultural and social reality. For example, in Sarina Pearson's chapter (Chapter 3), we are shown that, while Hollywood Indians are the mimetic capital of the Maori, with whom they express their empathy as vanishing indigenes, by mimicking the former, the latter see this as an opportunity to show the others that they are also modern cosmopolitan subjects. Sometimes mimesis involves copying past practices in the present. This is especially the case when indigenous societies try to distinguish themselves from each other in order to bring clarity to their identities (see, for example, Sergio Jarillo de la Torre on woodcraft in the Trobriand Islands in Chapter 5, and Elfriede Hermann on the birthday clothing of the Banabans in Fiji in Chapter 7). Doug Dalton's chapter on Christianity among the Rawa (Chapter 9) emphasizes the importance of looking at the historical processes that might help shape contemporary (religious) mimetic practices: this chapter sheds light on the substantial relationship between anthropology and history.

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This book expands the definition of what mimesis is. To move beyond physical or behavioural mimicry, it reveals mimesis in art, clothing, woodcraft, wedding ceremonies, Christmas celebrations and even capitalism. Of all these examples of mimesis, I was particularly struck by the chapter on mimicking capitalism (Chapter 6 by Roger Ivar Lohmann), a counter-example of how capitalism failed to be brought to the Asabano of Papua New Guinea. The chapter reminds one of the importance, as an anthropologist, not only of asking *why*, but also *why not* when it comes to understanding another culture.

Reviewed by LAI HUNG YU

DPhil candidate in Social Anthropology, School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography, University of Oxford, 51 Banbury Road, Oxford OX2 6PE. E-mail: [lai.yu@anthro.ox.ac.uk](mailto:lai.yu@anthro.ox.ac.uk)

**DANIEL MILLER**, *The comfort of people*, Cambridge UK and Medford MA: Polity Press 2017, x, 226 pp. ISBN 978-1-5095-2432-7.

The hospice movement is widely celebrated for having re-conceptualized death, transfiguring it from a time of loss into a time of new beginnings. Daniel Miller's sensitive ethnography, *The comfort of people*, explores this conceptual shift, investigating how English hospice patients overcome the obstacles of sustaining intimacy at the end of life by using new media, from Facebook to cell phones, to expand their social possibilities in isolating times. With eighteen richly told vignettes of life in a hospice, bookended by an anchoring introduction, a gesturing conclusion and a practical compendium of recommendations to improve end of life care, Miller's ethnography is a significant contribution to the broader anthropological themes of death and dying, care, relatedness, new media and contemporary England.

The dying have long suffered social isolation in the West, and recent research has emphasized how particularly lonely the dying feel in contemporary England. While anthropological literature often explains this social isolation of the dying through the medicalization and institutionalization of death, Miller astutely shows that the loneliness the dying feel in England is exacerbated by English patterns of social behavior. Looking specifically at hospice life in villages, Miller observes that much English sociality in a village happens in public places, such as pubs or in brief chats on the streets when walking the dog. But dying makes it difficult to participate publicly, as patients feel too ill to leave the house or find themselves too occupied with the exhausting list of doctor's appointments they must attend. The dying in England are not only detached publicly, but also find it difficult to

socialize in private spaces: the English rarely invite people into their homes and are especially fearful of being too invasive and intrusive into others' personal lives. While it is assumed that the dying feel more connected to community life in villages, Miller observes that the public detachment and social reticence of the English make it difficult for hospice patients in villages to feel accompanied at the end of their lives, when they need social support the most.

However, Miller shows how new media help alleviate the social obstacles the English encounter while dying. For one informant, Sarah, Facebook provides a medium for her both to connect to people intimately, despite geographical distance, and to keep her friends updated on her disease, thus casting her news widely and publicly. This updating process has two real benefits for Sarah. The first is that it enables her and her social network to confront the difficulties of death at a helpful distance. Posting online allows Sarah to distribute difficult information about herself more indirectly than calling someone on the phone. It also helps her network to provide support that does not seem to interrupt her private space or take up her time. Secondly, Facebook helps Sarah update most of her social network with one post, thus lessening the emotional and practical labour of continually keeping relations abreast of a fast-updating disease. Like Sarah's experience with Facebook, Miller reveals how other new media, from online social platforms to new digital technologies like iPads, help hospice patients relate comfortably and easily. These conclusions help Miller argue, as his previous studies of new media have done, that face-to-face contact is inherently neither more intimate nor more nourishing, and that new forms of media, especially among the English, can help sustain old bonds and form new ones in death.

Popular wisdom posits historical relations, such as kin and long-lasting friends, as more durable, making new associations through contracted care and new technologies seem weak in comparison. Yet, Miller's informants often connect with others quickly but profoundly over a shared disease or a similar terminal diagnosis in their last months, for example, on online web forums. Further, popular discourses on care for the dying naturalize the family as the best source of nurturance and herald the community as a place of strong bonds. However, Miller challenges these assumptions and examines how the English actually prefer the institutional care of a hospice at their end. Miller observes that his informants found everyday care-giving tasks, like bathing and feeding, too intimate and cumbersome for family and friends to do and preferred that contracted caregivers carry out these responsibilities. Contracted care sets up specific dates and times through phone calls for care-provision in the home, which patients preferred to the unscheduled dropping in of friends and family into the

home. Instead of the hospice and its caregivers being unsatisfactory stand-ins for friends and family, Miller notes that English patients often found them to be preferable sources of care, since they were experienced as unobtrusive and helpfully mediated. Miller's ethnography therefore challenges dominant discourses about right relations in care, showing, through the examination of the social worlds of the dying, how these new relations made at the end of life through new technologies and in the hospice are not poor substitutes for natural, enduring relations, but are nourishing, robust and uniquely comforting in their own right.

Miller's ethnography is layered and extensive, and he leaves open several lines of inquiry that may inspire further avenues of study. For example, his informants rarely mentioned religion and the church in their experiences of dying, which is an intriguing observation given his conclusion that the English appreciate the rather distant role of institutions in the provision of care. England is not the only place where religion is no longer a significant part of the dying trajectory, and it would have been interesting to hear more from Miller about whether he agrees with the common conclusion that medicine or the individual has replaced God in death. Additionally, Miller does not highlight the ages of the dying in his ethnography. The feeling of isolation and the capacity to rebuild networks noticeably shifts throughout the life course of those he studied, where the younger dying were more able to form new relationships with a greater variety of media and where the older dying struggled more intensely, with fewer options for connectivity. How might this attention to age help us think more specifically about the intersection of new media and social connectivity in death? These observations should not be read as critiques of Miller's analysis, but as praise for the richness of his ethnography. As all good ethnographies should, Miller's includes ethnographic detail that his overarching arguments cannot subsume, and therefore leave room for the discerning ethnographic eye to draw its own conclusions.

Dying in England can be isolating, but Miller's surprising conclusion that the hospice and the new media facilitate intimacy in death for the English helps to show how new innovations may enable, rather than impede, older historical norms. Miller's work is timely, full of nuance and takes forward conversations about death. His ethnography shines light on the resilience of the social to adapt care strategies for those dying in contemporary and often fraught circumstances.

Reviewed by CARRIE RYAN

DPhil, tutor, University of Oxford, lecturer, Oxford Brookes University. School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography, 51 Banbury Road, Oxford OX2 6PE. E-mail: [carrie-ryan@anthro.ox.ac.uk](mailto:carrie-ryan@anthro.ox.ac.uk)

**DEV NATH PATHAK (ed.)**, *Another South Asia!*, New Delhi: Primus Books 2018, 323 pp., \$69.95. ISBN- 978-93-86552-58-7 (hardback), 978-93-86552-59-4 (print on demand).

Through an interdisciplinary prism, *Another South Asia!* allows readers to catch a glimpse of a different South Asia, one that is yet to be captured by nation state-centric narratives. Using the word ‘another’ as a metaphor and a unique discursive trope, the edited book brings together an ensemble of essays to re-imagine South Asia beyond the cartographic boundaries of its composite nation states. Going beyond the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC), the book indeed makes an effort to see South Asia in its messy everyday lived realities, the poetry that transgresses state boundaries, the trajectory of fluid faiths and the travels of artists who re-imagine the region without being chained to the quotidian politics of its nation states. It is, in other words, an exercise in subversion of the dominant political narratives that allegedly fail to realize what ‘South Asia’ is.

Punctuated by artworks by a well-known Sri Lankan artist, Pala Pothupitiye, the book starts with a preface and is otherwise divided into four sections and fourteen chapters. The preface, along with introductory essay by the editor, Dev Nath Pathak, elucidates the significance of the utopia of the word ‘another’ to embark upon a quest to re-imagine South Asia. In the first section, the chapters by Shail Mayaram and Navnita Chadha Behera attempt to challenge the cartographic imagination of South Asia by appealing to the civilizational ethos of the region, which dates back before the formation of SAARC.

The second section uses the motifs of presence and absence to highlight the failure of dominant imaginings of South Asia, as Arjun Guneratne argues. The essay by Ravi Kumar offers an understanding of the region that subverts the abstract, instrumentalist notion in order to make a case for an ‘organic’ South Asian collective consciousness. Again, in Santosh Kumar Singh’s study of the Ravidassia Movement, readers encounter the fluidity of faiths as juxtaposed to the rigidity of religious identities that often becomes a cause of contention in the region. This makes the identity politics that South Asian nation states frequently pitch along lines of religion somewhat fuzzy. In the final chapter in this section, Laxmi Murthy makes a case for feminist theorizing and activism in the region against the background of gender violence faced by women across South Asia during the anti-imperialist struggles and the inter- and intra-state violence of more recent times.

The third section of the book delves into the realms of novel possibilities in the face of manifold challenges. In Irfanullah Farooqi’s lucid account, a vivid image of a local South Asia emerges that is expressed in the writings and poetry of the members of the Progressive Writers Association (PWA). Farooqi’s analysis of the PWA’s works brings out much more about what

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South Asia really signifies in the face of dry political manoeuvrings. This comes to the fore through the trope of melodrama, discussed by Dev Nath Pathak and Avanti Chhatre in the next chapter. This chapter presents a vivid, colourful cruise across the performative landscape of South Asia, as the authors trace how historical changes across the region are expressed in shifts in melodramatic form. As a result, the chapter sketches an experiential South Asia, duly translocal in nature. The other chapters in this section by Anushka Rajendran, Jyoti Sinha and Abha Sur, as well as Kiranmayi Bhushi, consecutively engage with the idea of South Asia through the lenses of contemporary art, diaspora and ethnic foodscapes. Rajendran's essay is a critical commentary on how art becomes a crucial site of resistance and negotiations with collective memories and individual trauma. The chapters by Sinha and Sur, which are followed by Bhushi's chapter, are rich ethnographic reflections on South Asian subjectivities that produce and re-produce South Asian cultural identities by exploiting ethnicities and territorialities abroad.

Finally, the fourth section of the book comes full circle, as it concludes by opening windows for newer imaginations of future possibilities. In his chapter, which sketches out the trajectories of artists' travels across the region, Sasanka Perera attempts to draw an 'experiential cartography' of South Asia. Through his engagement with artists' collectives and their projects, Perera suggests that such creative-collaborative ventures often provide spaces for honing collective South Asian sensibilities outside the confines of nation states. The last chapter in the volume, by Imtiaz Ahmed, is an exercise to rediscover ways in which another South Asia can be reconstructed by leaving behind the debris of wars and conflicts that mar its post-colonial landscape. It ends on a note of utopia in which there are multiple possibilities for its future.

This volume is a creative inter-disciplinary curatorial achievement that holds out promises for imagining a South Asia that defies cartographic constraints. However, borders and linguistic confines are often difficult to avoid. This volume too repeatedly falls into such traps. Most significantly, it does not really break through the larger cartography of South Asia as conjured up by SAARC. The chapters in this volume revolve around the confines of the eight member states of a SAARC-drawn South Asia and therefore do little to go beyond the larger territorial contours. Despite such shortcomings, however, this volume is a comprehensive piece of work.

Reviewed by ANAKSHI PAL

PhD student, Department of Sociology, Room 807, South Asian University, Akbar Bhawan, Chanakyapuri, New Delhi 110021, India. Email: anakshipal92@gmail.com

**SOPHIE SEEBACH** and **RANE WILLERSLEV** (eds.), *Mirrors of passing: unlocking the mysteries of death, materiality, and time*, New York: Berghahn Books 2018, 362 pp. ISBNs 978-1-78533-908-0 (p/b), 978-1-78533-894-6 (h/b), eISBN 978-1-78533-895-3.

This edited text is a study of human bodily death and material decay, and their significance as central points of reference in cultural life across time and place. The text is positioned as a companion piece to the 'Letting Go' exhibition at the Museum of Cultural History in Oslo, marking the closure of Willerslev's 'Death, Materiality, and the Origin of Time' project.

Seebach and Willerslev seek to offer key insights into human perceptions of time, to unlock death's hidden connections with materiality and time, and to understand its nature, why it is a necessary part of life and how we as human beings cope with the existential challenges it poses. Adopting a multi-sited, multi-disciplinary approach, they seek to address questions of the afterlife that normally remain unconsidered in the social sciences due to their methodological atheism. This text therefore sees relationships with the dead 'as absolutely necessary to the flow of time and the continuation of life' (5). This means presenting human relationships with death not only as what makes us human, but as what defines us as distinctively living human beings. To achieve this aim, the text addresses four themes: Death's Time; Materialities of Death; Life after Death; and Exhibiting Death, Materiality, and Time. While no final conclusion is reached concerning death's relationship to materiality and time, the manner of the exploration and the exploration itself offer extensive insights into the multitude of practices surrounding death and give pause for thought about the role of the dead in our own lives and the lives of others.

Part 1 (Death's Time) is split into five chapters. The first of these is Stuart McLean's study of James Joyce's story 'The Dead'. Going against the reduction of the social presence of the dead associated with the process of becoming modern, McLean proposes that death and the dead are an indispensable and constitutive component not only of cultural memory, but also of the very texture of our being-in-the-world. Using Joyce's story and drawing on Henri Bergson's work on time, he demonstrates that death in literature is able to turn the reader's attention to the immanence of the durational past in the material substance of the world, thus allowing for the simultaneous coexistence of multiple languages and possibilities, of past and present, living and dead. Following this, Marina Prusac-Lindhagen offers a novel reading of a Roman fresco in the Villa dei Misteri, located in the suburbs of Pompeii (first century BC). Drawing on the religious beliefs associated with Orphism, she notes that time in Orphism is thought of in terms of both cosmological eternity and the individual experience of

a limited lifetime on Earth. This perspective allows Prusac-Lindhagen to read the fresco as a picture of an Orphic ritual that cherishes youthful love on earth for the purposes of natural sustainability through resurrection. From here, this section moves on to Rune Nyord's analysis of ancient Egyptian mortuary practices. From the hypothesis that the long-lasting external shape of the mummy had more to do with the mummification process than the aims of the Egyptians, Nyord seeks to understand how these mortuary practices can be thought of instead as the transformation of the deceased into gods through spells. These spells are seen as assisting the function of death as a movement away from the multiplicity of the created world and back toward a primeval unity. That is, as part of a regression to the pre-cosmological world, it is necessary to take on the role of creating the cosmos through differentiation, which itself is achieved through spells. This allows the personhood of the deceased to dissolve and enter fixed mythological and ritual roles in the regeneration of the world, including giving up one's own identity for that of a deity. Chapter 4, by Per Ditlef Fredriksen, seeks to understand how the past can be understood as actively shaping the present through a study of death sites, particularly Nyamaan Bridge in northern KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Here, death sites are thought of as places that attract death and may cause more deaths, thus making practices associated with securing the dead important for the fate of the living. There is no clear divide in this study between the world of the living and the world of the dead, challenging modern thinking's tendency to organize our messy being tidily into sealed and binary ontological compartments. In the final chapter in this section, Theresa Ammann reads Ebola as a life-altering rupture or a possibility of death to those who come into indirect or direct contact with it. Through death, insecurities, uncertainties and/or hardships, this contact alters the past, present and future of individuals and their materialities. By tracing the factors of loneliness and the fear of touching a loved one associated with Ebola, the author shows how, even after Ebola has left a community, its persistent traces continue to ripple through survivors' lives (and thus, time) both temporally and materially as it permeates their bodies, minds, memories, relations and professions, eradicating both present and future.

Part 2 (Materialities of Death) consists of four chapters, each focusing on the role of materiality in death practices. Rane Willerslev and Jeannette Lykkegård's opening chapter on the Siberian Chukchi reveals how materials such as a reindeer skin death suit, spirit food made from reindeer fat and fur from a white rabbit, and bells for scaring off devouring spirits, as well as practices of taking care of the dead and destroying the body, are not only important for the journey of the dead to the realm of the ancestors, but also for the living community.

Following this, Matthew Walsh and Sean O'Neill focus on materiality in death practices across seven different indigenous groups in the North American Arctic. Here, while death practices and beliefs such as reincarnation or naming children after an ancestor vary between Inuit groups, practices surrounding valuable commodities are shaped by environmental necessity. The authors demonstrate that, in this setting, the crafting of miniature versions of items carried by a now-deceased individual allows those same items to be reused in an otherwise resource-limited environment. Thus, human materiality becomes something that is not solely altered by death and time, as it is also contingent on the whims of the living, from which objects are conferred value. In Malthe Lehrman's subsequent chapter, the function of sacred stone cairns in Mongolia or *ovoos* is examined. These stone structures are shown to be a meshwork of offerings, continually requiring repair and food to function as a gateway between the worlds of the living and the dead. *Ovoos*, as described in this chapter, become a means of both transforming multiple worlds and showing respect to the dead ancestors and spirits, thus protecting oneself from potential harm. This produces an intrinsic connection between people and the dead for a short time within an open-ended cosmos of opportunity. In the final chapter in this section, Clarissa Martins Lima and Felipe Vander Velden call into question the Othering of the dead through their examination of the connections between the dead, materiality and time from the vantage point of the territory inhabited by two native South American peoples (the Karitiana of the south-west Brazilian Amazon and the Xukuru of the semi-arid north-east Amazon). As a result of this study, they highlight two themes that stand out for both communities regarding the world of the dead. First, there is a nexus between death, time and materiality that reveals how the dead cannot be taken away or completely alienated because their presence is necessary to the continuity of life on a soil that is always very specific. Secondly, given that there are multiple kinds of death, the idea of the dead as Others must be questioned. This chapter therefore exposes the flaws in an Othering of the dead that ignores their multifaceted status and their interplay with the living.

Part 3 (Life after Death) also consists of four chapters, each of which concerns, in one way or another, the social role of the dead in communities. Dorte Refslund Christensen and Kjetil Sandvik's opening chapter brings to light how the grief work of parents, through the Danish website *Mindet.dk*, allows for grief as a making presence of a child, as a keeping presence of a child, and as a performance of parenthood. As a result of this grief work, the authors posit that, though death may end a life, the relationship is still able to continue. Following this, Susan Matland switches the focus to how social identities, the personal histories of an individual and the relationships of the dead individual to others change when

someone dies. Examining the identities of Aslak Jacobsen Hætta and Mons Alaksen Somby, Sami indigenous people of Norway who were beheaded on 14 October 1854 following the Kautokeino rebellion of 1852, the author traces their identity from their being sent to the Department of Anatomy in the University of Christiania (Oslo) to their repatriation and burial in 1997. From this, Matland notes that changes to a person's identity are gradual, happening over time as new narratives emerge. These changes are linked to both the deceased's identity at death and their physical remains. Johanna Sumiala's subsequent chapter examines the becoming-immortal of the Finnish skier Mika Myllylä. Reading the manner in which Myllylä's life was reported as a form of death ritual, Sumiala sees Myllylä's death as offering the opportunity to ask questions about contemporary Finnish culture, identity, masculinity and heroism, his death also revealing something about contemporary Finnish society and the dilemma between the ideals it exalts as heroic and the reality of pursuing them. In the final chapter in this section, Christiane Falck questions how people interact and appropriate new things that have only recently become part of their life-worlds, including anthropologists, specifically concerning death practices. Focusing on the Nyaura village of Timbunmeli in Papua New Guinea, the author describes a context in which the materialities of the living and the dead are linked, understandings of this materiality and its associated temporality being played out through mortuary rituals, and new technologies – such as cell phones – being appropriated to connect the visible and the invisible worlds of the living and the dead and to materialize the presence of the dead. The most intriguing part of Falck's account is how she herself became part of the death rituals through her whiteness interacting with local beliefs about the appearance of the dead. Here, death can be seen not just as something to be studied, but as something that affects the process of the study itself and that anthropologists must therefore take into account.

In Part 4 (Exhibiting Death, Materiality, and Time), Alexandra Schüssler examines the attempts made to represent the aspects of death explored in the edited text in the form of a museum exhibition. Reporting on this, she recounts the struggles involved in staging this exhibition and conveying its messages to its audience.

In *Mirrors of Passing*, Seebach and Willerslev have successfully revealed novel ways of approaching death from the perspectives of time, materiality and the social role of the dead. While, as they admit, no final concluding statement about the relationships between death, materiality and time appear possible, this edited collection does not require one. The value of this text comes not from any one particular statement, but from the range of perspectives it offers and what these perspectives can themselves offer those persons wishing to understand

death beyond the assumptions about it that are hidden in modern life. This volume is highly relevant for anyone interested in cultural anthropology, social anthropology, museum studies, religious studies or sociological studies of death.

Reviewed by ALEXANDER FOSTER

MPhil candidate in Medical Anthropology, Institute for Social and Cultural Anthropology, School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography, University of Oxford, 64 Banbury Road, Oxford OX2 6PN. E-mail: alexander.foster@anthro.ox.ac.uk

**KATHERINE SWANCUTT** and **MIREILLE MAZARD** (eds.), *Animism beyond the soul: ontology, reflexivity, and the making of anthropological knowledge*, Oxford: Berghahn 2018, 160 pp. \$27.95/£19.00. ISBN 978-1-78533-866-3.

The focus of this collection of articles is the anthropology of ontology, but with an awareness of the concern for reflexivity that emerged from the ‘Writing Culture’ debate of the 1980s. Using the theme of animism, the editors deploy the notion of ‘hyper-reflexivity’, as well as drawing on what they call the ‘reflexive feedback loop’ between the researcher and his or her interlocutors. The aim is to illustrate the mutually influencing knowledge-making dynamic between native epistemologies and anthropology itself in order to prompt new insights into understandings of animism and personhood.

The six authors represented in the collection, who more or less echo one another in their own chapters, are united in the belief that native views of the soul and anthropological reflexivity are mutually constitutive (5-6). ‘Hyper-reflexivity’ is adopted as a way to illustrate the encounters between native animism and ideologies that come from the outside, as shown in Mireille Mazard’s research among Nusu Chinese in Chapter 1. The ‘reflexive feedback loop’ can also be found in Diana Espírito Santo’s notes on her spiritual relationships with her interlocutors in Cuba and Brazil, as well as in Kathleen Richardson’s work revealing a mutually influential relationship between science fiction and technological development in the world of artificial intelligence. Some of the authors, who are guided by the notion of ‘hyper-reflexivity’, place special emphasis on the knowledge interaction between themselves and their informants. Olga Ulturgasheva is aware of her role in shaping Eveny children’s and adolescents’ futures by asking them how they imagine their future lives. Katherine Swancutt also provides honest accounts of her collaboration with two native scholars in southwest China, which contain both disagreements over and adjustments to their understandings of the Nuosu ‘soul-spider’ and the tropes of luring and capture in Nuosu sociality. However, not all

the book's authors follow the same approach in responding to the reflexivity debate. Vanessa Elisa Grotti and Marc Brightman point out that the notion of 'double reflexivity' is more suitable for an Amazonian context which is self-internalized on the one hand and constituted through inter-personal relationships on the other. Espírito Santo also emphasizes the concept of 'deep reflexivity' as the reflexive aspect of the cosmos itself.

This awareness of reflexivity endows the book with a sense of honesty. More importantly, this epistemological concern does not conceal the ontological depth of the authors' findings on animism. By looking at animism beyond a concern with the soul, the collection meets its aim of illustrating the various ways the spiritual aspects of personhood may be understood (8).

The book's two editors, who are also the authors of the two chapters on southwest China, both recall E.B. Tylor's original definition of animism, but they also offer new perspectives in the poly-ontological circumstances about which they are writing. In Chapter 1, Mazard elicits the non-dualistic and complex nature of animistic personhood in Tylor's work, which agrees with her findings on the 'algebraic' qualities of Nusu personhood. Mazard suggests that Nusu identity is informed by the pluralized and fragmented selves that can be seen as one of the soul's attributes. Nusu shamans have the linguistic ability to coordinate the pluralism of these attributes of the soul, which vary across gender and species; but the uncertainties involved in this poly-ontological context, such as the encounter between Nusu animism and Christian doctrine, increase the sense of ambiguity in rituals. In Chapter 4, Swancutt focuses on the 'art of capture' enacted in the Nuosu animism of the 'soul-spider', which is non-dualistic and in itself reflexive. The art of luring and capturing one's 'soul-spider' in the ritualized warfare of exorcism succeeds in coming to life in Nuosu people's interactions with the eco-friendly ideology of present-day China.

Two other chapters focus on animism and personhood in Latin America. In Chapter 2, Espírito Santo suggests that the Cuban Espiritismo practitioners' spirits have agency that enfolds within the person. Although having different dispositions, spirits are human-like and have different impacts on people. For instance, a person can be driven to take up a writing career when her spirit appears dressed as a European scholar in a dark suit. In Chapter 5, Grotti and Brightman look at the autobiographies of certain Trio, an Amazonian group, and argue that native Amazonian personhood is related to alterity. Since a person's name is believed to bind his or her body and soul, the utterance of the name in the course of an autobiographical narration becomes a way of connecting the invisible world of the dead,

which contrasts with the original anticipation of Christianity, which introduced literary practice.

The remaining two chapters are also closely engaged in a discussion of animism, being concerned with personhood both human and non-human. In Chapter 3, Ulturgasheva argues that Siberian Eveny adolescents' predictions and fulfilments of their future should be seen as a spatial extension of their personhood, which is similar to the movements of reindeer herding and of shadow-catching by the body. This prior component of Siberian personhood is called *djuluchen*, which are partible, detachable and kinetically enacted with both humans and animals. Finally, the last chapter by Richardson brings the topic of animism out of its classic religious settings into science and technology studies. By examining artificial intelligence fiction and inventions in America and Japan, she argues that the 'uncanny' aspects of humanoid robots may embody a 'non-human' personhood.

In conclusion, the authors in this collection have cooperated in making a bold and meaningful attempt to provide in-depth research on animism through their honest awareness of the significance of reflexivity. They have met the goal they have set themselves of illustrating the different understandings of the spiritual and invisible aspects of personhood they describe.

Reviewed by YUXIN PENG

MPhil candidate in Medical Anthropology, Institute for Social and Cultural Anthropology, School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography, University of Oxford, 64 Banbury Road, Oxford OX2 6PN. E-mail: yuxin.peng@anthro.ox.ac.uk

**TERENCE S. TURNER**, *The fire of the jaguar*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 2017, 243 pp. Paperback: \$35.00. ISBN: 978-0-9973675-4-6.

*The fire of the jaguar* has become something of a myth in and of itself within the anthropological community, as its publication has been highly anticipated and long awaited. Ask any anthropologist, and they are sure to have heard whispers of a canonically comprehensive copy primed and ready and circulating among colleagues, an imagined analysis never realized until now. A seminal work of rigorous analysis, Terrence Turner's *The fire of the jaguar* is a collation consisting not only of a detailed examination of the Kayapo myth delineating the origin of cooking fire, but also of three essays providing an intersectional approach to an immersive understanding of the Kayapo life-world and the methodology Turner employs in dialogue with, and at times against, structuralist and perspectival approaches. Fixating his attention on a single myth, Turner sets out to analyse

each episode categorically and exhaustively, employing structural matrices and graphs as a means of understanding the complexity of each isolated component – spatial, temporal, symbolic or otherwise. Although the complexity and thickness of his structural account can be quite overwhelming, Turner’s repetitious telling of the myth several times throughout Part One, as if unravelling a spool of thread, reveals more and more in each re-visit, steadily unpacking its inherent complexity. Exposing myth as model both *of* and *for* in the Geertzian sense (1973) in Kayapo society, we see the efflorescence of a boy into a man, and of society itself, through the transformational capacity of fire that stems from its acquisition and replication—in other words, through socialization, ‘men make society by the same process through which they make themselves’ (19).

In Part One, ‘The fire of the jaguar: The Kayapo myth of the origin of cooking fire,’ Turner employs notions of dynamic structuralism à la Piaget, systematically unpacking the myth layer by layer (xxxix). Following a brief description of the Kayapo social scene, he embarks on a deconstruction of Kayapo myth and its underlying structures, identified in episodic transformations whose patterning is seen to mirror the ‘dynamic pattern of action’ representative not merely of the myth’s structure, but also of Kayapo social structure (145). These transformations, in Kayapo understanding, are constitutive of ‘Society’ in that Society itself is not formed by human beings, but ‘can be recreated or transformed’ by them (30). Occupying an adversarial position in relation to Lévi-Strauss and the label ‘structuralist,’ Turner’s proclaimed distancing is counteracted by his insistence on the importance of ‘transformation’ and transformative processes as explanatory mechanisms of symbolic meaning and societal creation.

The jaguar in the myth does not have children of his own, but ‘adopts’ the boy whom he and his jaguar wife are nurturing towards manhood. The jaguars are seemingly incapable of reproduction—of producing offspring and fire—in that they subsist on the latter, continuously burning a log as the sole jaguar family to be. However, through their concerned efforts in ‘raising’ the boy, the latter is able to reproduce fire by ‘using fire to make fire’, that is, ‘using the fire to produce itself: in other words, using the transformational process to transform itself into an open-ended, infinite series of uniform replications of itself’ (200-1). By means of his socialization, the boy is able to socialize the fire and in turn, transform, produce and re-produce society itself (38). Human society is differentiable from all others in its ability to re-produce, that is, in its ‘infinite replicability of cultural artifacts and social forms’ (46). The key to Turner’s argument, and fundamental to his disagreement with Viveiros de Castro on how we come to understand origin myths, is that what characterizes

human society is specifically this ability to *reproduce* and not just *possess* things. Essential to this replicability is transformation, which appears as model both *of* and *for* the creation of ‘human culture’, that is, of society.

By the same token, myth as model can be seen to depict the power of transformation through its replication of transformational patterning that gives ‘form’ to ‘mythic thought’, which in turn reveals Kayapo social organization—a notion expanded in the three articles of Part Two. Most interestingly, the book ends with Turner’s article, ‘The crisis of late structuralism,’ a simultaneous homage to and inquisition of structuralism and its postmodern Amazonian offshoots, perspectivism and animism. Rejecting the argument that ‘production is not a transformational process’, Turner derides the ‘orthodoxy’ of Lévi-Straussian structuralism, bringing Eduardo Viveiros de Castro into the mix as well, as a means of attributing agency to active subjects and emphasizing the dynamic nature of ‘structure’ (228). Turner ends with a call to incorporate dynamic transformative properties into theoretical approaches and methodology—involving ‘Marxian concepts of productive praxis’ and ‘interpretationist and semiotic approaches’ in accordance with Lévi-Straussian structuralism—a strategy on which he relies in his analysis of *The fire of the jaguar* and which he incorporates into Part Two as both an aspect of his focused investigation and an emblematic exemplar (243).

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Reviewed by LAUREN FELDMAN

MSc student in Social Anthropology, Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography, University of Oxford, 64 Banbury Road, Oxford OX2 6PN. E-mail: lauren.feldman@anthro.ox.ac.uk