

the essays have a strong theoretical emphasis leaving the reader wondering to what extent the South African reality matches her arguments.

Despite such shortcomings, the author can nevertheless be lauded for stimulating a discussion on human rights by opening up interesting avenues of thought drawing on a wide scope of academic disciplines and theoretical stances. Anyone involved in human rights in general and in South Africa in particular will benefit from reading the essays in this publication.

Alexander Rödlach

McCauley, Robert N., and E. Thomas Lawson: *Bringing Ritual to Mind. Psychological Foundations of Cultural Forms.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. 236 pp. ISBN 0-521-01629-0. Price: £ 16.95

McCauley and Lawson here engage their theory of religious ritual competence (*Rethinking Religion*. Cambridge 1990) with Melanesian material, principally Harvey Whitehouse's "Inside the Cult" (Oxford 1995). Their theory lies between – or rather links – cognitive anthropology and social anthropology; it is they say general rather than particular, systematic rather than idiosyncratic, and favours explanation over interpretation. The introduction poses some initial problems: Why do some rituals allow substitution (a cucumber in exchange for the Nuer ox)? Why are some rituals reversible (i. e., undoable) and others not? Why do some necessitate specialised personnel?

They start by affirming that in ritual, religious cognitive processes are essentially the same as in everyday cognitions. There is little here on religious thinking in general beyond noting that humans tend to attribute agency (here to divinities) beyond what conditions warrant. We can look at rituals by noting at what point divinity (the gods, God, spirits, the ancestors) intervene in a ritual, whether at the final stage or earlier on in the sequence of enabling rituals. (Holy Water is only efficacious because it has been *previously* consecrated by the priest through ultrahuman agency.) This has certain consequences: notably that divine intervention with an active human agent is more direct (say with the consecration of a priest) than divine intervention on a mediating instrument (Holy Communion), and thus might quite rarely need to be reversed (defrocking) in a way the Mass does not; and similarly, intervention with a human agent does not have to be repeated, nor can it be substituted (the cucumber); and the more proximal to a direct agent the divine intervention is, the greater the centrality that ritual has (compare Baptism with the Mass – or the latter with Holy Communion among born-again Pentecostals).

The authors suggest that with religious fragmentation, the successor groups will not identify with one another if one or other has abandoned a central ritual (compare Roman Catholics with Orthodox and with Quakers in relation to Holy Communion). They proceed to the question of how in nonliterate societies, religious

ritual constantly maintains the same form. (And we must take it that it does.) They follow Dan Sperber in arguing that religious ritual, like other cultural transmissions, may be potentially unstable and therefore (by selection) rituals tend to one of two types: (a) instrumental and special patient (i. e., humans acted upon) rituals where there is little sensory stimulus or emotional arousal but which are relatively frequent; (b) special agent rituals which are infrequent but more likely to involve immediate divine intervention at the level of the performing agent (what they describe as high sensory pageantry). The former is memorable by sheer repetition and the second because of the high arousal "flashbulb memories" it involves. McCauley and Lawson note that flashbulb memories work not only through emotional arousal but through rehearsal and consolidation: arguing against Whitehouse's implication of emotional arousal alone as enhancing memory, they argue that "emotion" may merely signal a quite independent increased cognitive awareness.

They describe Whitehouse's ethnography of the Kivung, a routinised (cargo) cult in New Britain with its frequent and repeated staid rituals; and a chiliastic splinter group which moves out holding more ecstatic practices including "emotionally exciting" nudity. Whitehouse labels the Kivung as "doctrinal," the splinter group as "imagist." McCauley and Lawson share Whitehouse's idea that manipulation of emotion in ritual is tied to mnemonic issues, whilst arguing for the more fundamental variables outlined above (the "ritual form" hypothesis). They argue that Whitehouse's notion is a hypothesis simply of "ritual frequency" (the frequency of any ritual leads to lower sensory pageantry or emotion), whilst the ritual form hypothesis includes actors' own tacit knowledge about ritual form which influences performance frequency (which by itself as an independent variable would remain rather mysterious). The "ritual form" hypothesis also addresses the question of motivation and thus again subjectivity. Special instrument and special patient rituals do not involve the immediate intervention of divinity, unlike special agent rituals where the agents (priests, rabbis, prophets, etc.) act in the gods' stead as ritual intermediaries. The former rituals are thus repeatable and are repeated. (Getting a second blessing may be helpful but being initiated a second time is redundant.) The ritual frequency hypothesis assumes that infrequent rituals need an injection of emotion to make them memorable, to which the authors oppose their ritual form hypothesis which explains, they argue, both frequency as well as emotion (or high ritual pageantry).

After dealing with the problems of what counts as "frequency," what as "participation," they proceed to apparently contradictory cases (infrequent low pageantry, and frequent high pageantry), and thence to some general conclusions: that the tedium of the doctrinal mode will lead to particular moves towards high pageantry special agent rituals but that these may fail through habituation to high emotion, and thus have to be seldom or risk being pushed through an impossible sensory overload. And breakaways from "balanced groups" (which contain

both types of ritual, doctrinal and imagist) like Christianity have to be more severe; and if the breakaway group collapses there is less chance of it being absorbed back into the parent group, unlike with “unbalanced groups” (who use one or the other type of ritual alone). Unbalanced groups may “deflate” with increasingly less sensory pageantry in their special agent rituals (if they are of the high emotion imagist group). And unbalanced doctrinal groups may evaporate through sheer boredom. McCauley and Lawson conclude by arguing special agent (infrequent high sensory pageantry) rituals are probably older and certainly more fundamental.

The test of the value of a scientific hypothesis is whether it predicts, explains, or makes sense of new data. To take some of my own material: the Spiritual (Shouter) Baptists of Trinidad practice occasional *mourning* which involves dramatic sensory deprivation, fasting, social isolation, high arousal, and communion with the gods: so far so good – an infrequent high pageantry ritual. A splinter group, the Earth People (but now with an increasingly non-Christian theology) have established a commune in the bush whose sole religious ritual is the gathering, preparation, and distribution of their food (hence every day) under the direct guidance of their leader who *is* their divinity, Nature herself. So here we have a long established frequent ritual with direct divine intervention and transformation of members which takes place at a high emotional intensity. Here the god (in person) does the same thing over and over again: special agent ritual with high frequency continuing over several years. The authors do consider an equivalent case from Whitehouse, to conclude that there the special agent ritual is repeated because it fails, and anyway the group is in the course of evolving: not the case with the Earth People where food is (miraculously) produced day after day. (And something similar seems to be true for frequent divine possession in other Afro-American groups – Umbanda, Candomblé, Voodoo.) My case, however, can be made to fit with the high frequency / low sensory pageantry type if we assume either that sensory pageantry is low during feeding time, even with the divinity present and announcing her divine act, or else the cooking and eating are just an instrumental ritual? I always have a worry that even the authors’ kind of quasi-mathematical hypothesis can be made to fit the ethnographic facts by appropriate shoehorning the data into one or the other box. But a provocative and very stimulating set of ideas: to be continued and defended I trust.

Roland Littlewood

Ott, Elisabeth: *Nkanyit und Gewalt. Häusliche Gewalt gegen Frauen in Samburu zwischen Tradition und Willkür.* Berlin: Weißensee Verlag, 2004. 246 Seiten. ISBN 3-89998-022-0. (Berliner Beiträge zur Ethnologie, 4) Preis: € 32,00

Geschlechtsspezifische Gewalt ist ein bislang kaum beachtetes Thema innerhalb der ethnologischen Geschlechterforschung, obwohl diese Form des Gewalthandelns den Alltag von Frauen in vielen Gesellschaften be-

einträchtigt und die Geschlechterkonstrukte prägt. Daher ist die nun veröffentlichte Dissertation der Berliner Ethnologin Elisabeth Ott ein innovativer Beitrag zur Analyse gewaltgeprägter Geschlechterhierarchien, zumal sie am Beispiel der Samburu-Gesellschaft in Kenia eheliche Gewalt aus der Perspektive der betroffenen Frauen betrachtet. Hier stehen die Sichtweisen und Reaktionen von Frauen unterschiedlichen Alters und sozialen Status im Zentrum der Auseinandersetzung.

In insgesamt sieben Kapiteln legt die Autorin ihre empirischen Forschungsergebnisse dar, wobei methodische Überlegungen, die Ethnographie der Samburu und deren Konzepte einer idealen Welt in vier Kapiteln vorgestellt werden und fast die Hälfte des Buches ausmachen. Zwei längere Kapitel sowie eine prägnante Zusammenfassung erläutern die physische Alltagsgewalt und unterschiedliche Reaktionen von Frauen im Umgang mit Gewalt.

Die Studie zeichnet sich durch ihre breite empirische Basis aus, die von einer intensiven Auseinandersetzung mit der Lebenswelt der Samburu-Frauen zeugt. Ausführliche und sinnvoll aufeinander abgestimmte Interviewpassagen lassen einzelne Frauen zu Wort kommen, zeigen ihr Meinungsspektrum zu Geschlechterfragen und illustrieren das Anliegen der Autorin, die emische Sicht auf häusliche Gewalt zu dokumentieren. Dabei sind Vorstellungen von “legitimer” bzw. willkürlicher Gewalt sowie Anpassungs- und Widerstandsstrategien der Frauen entscheidend. Elisabeth Ott stellt diese in einem lebendig geschriebenen Text dar, der von dem ihr entgegengebrachten Vertrauen zeugt. Nähe und Anteilnahme am Leben der Frauen durchziehen die gesamte Publikation, wobei es der Autorin immer wieder gelingt, ihre Beobachtungen zu reflektieren und in größere Kontexte einzuordnen.

Den Referenzrahmen bildet vor allem die Konzeption einer idealen Welt, bei der Ott sich auf ethnologische Klassiker über kenianische Nomadengesellschaften beruft und diese um eine Gender-Dimension ergänzt. Allerdings klammert sich die Ethnologin an etlichen Stellen, insbesondere bei der Interpretation von legitimer Gewalt im fünften Kapitel, sehr stark an die Konstruktion einer harmonischen Welt – teilweise sogar stärker als ihre Interviewpartnerinnen – und zieht weitreichende Schlüsse, die sie jedoch immer als eigene Interpretationen kennzeichnet (z.B. pp. 123 und 152).

Wünschenswert wäre es gewesen, wenn die Autorin stärker auf die strukturellen Widersprüche im gerontokratischen Gesellschaftsmodell eingegangen wäre, denn die bieten offensichtlich einen Schlüssel zum Verständnis der Handlungsrationalität von Frauen und Männern (203 f.). Hier wären gewiss Machtkonflikte zwischen Männern unterschiedlichen Alters und Status von Bedeutung. Auch die Veränderungen der Samburu-Ökonomie, konkret den Verlust der Rinderherden durch kolonialpolitische Eingriffe und wiederkehrende Dürren, hätte die Autorin eingehender behandeln können (141 ff.). Das betrifft insbesondere grundlegende Irritationen im Maskulinitätskonzept und die Herausforderungen für Männer, nicht mehr dem verinnerlichten