

inhuman rejectionism towards the bitter fate of today's migrants. There are of course other questions connected to the dynamics of Jewishness of Steven Robins and the likes, such as those relating to the Jews' attitudes during the apartheid era in South Africa, SWA and the Rhodesias, as well as the taciturn acceptance of apartheid by South African white middle classes. When reading the book – and I read it from cover to cover in one breath – quite a few associations and parallels emerge which the author could not have foreseen. This is another indication that this is a very good book that should be read by all, young and old, Jewish or not. A family's fate interspersed with grand events of history makes anthropology an indispensable tool for making our world intelligible.

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Riedel, Felix. 2016. *Hexenjagd und Aufklärung in Ghana. Von den medialen Inszenierungen des Okkulten zur Realität der Ghettos für Hexenjagdflüchtlinge*. Köln: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag. 369 pp.

Studies of witchcraft in Africa have a long history. From Evans-Pritchard's influential "second spear" argument to the comparative approaches advanced by Middleton and Winter, Marwick's "social strain-gauge" theory and Stoller and Olkes' first-hand accounts of the efficacy of sorcery through to the more recent attempts to explain the salient conflation of the occult and forces of "modernity," as formulated exemplarily (and most prominently) by the Comaroffs and Geschiere, scholars from across the social sciences have attended to witchcraft ideas and practices for discussing matters of rationality, irrationality and superstition, logic, symbolism and theories of natural causation, politics, power and gender relations and, ultimately, the place of ritual, custom and "tradition" in "modernising" societies across Africa.

Felix Riedel's book, developed from a PhD thesis in anthropology that was defended at the University of Mainz, attempts to add a new twist to this long and somewhat chequered history of Africanist witchcraft studies. It does so mainly by taking issue with most of the earlier

theories and approaches, the recent “modernity of witchcraft” thesis in particular, and by suggesting a shift in focus from the study of those who believe in – and hunt – “witches” to those who fall victim to witchcraft accusations, and hunts. One of the main arguments of the book is that witchcraft beliefs and accusations are neither a response to social, political and economic crises induced by modern exigencies, as proponents of the “modernity of witchcraft” thesis contend, nor can they be traced back to other secondary factors, such as social leveller functions, tensions over inheritance or structural misogyny, as many of the more sociologically-oriented theories claim. Rather, Riedel argues, witchcraft beliefs and accusations themselves *are* the crisis, and they stem from a complex interplay of “individual idiosyncrasies” and “psychosocial situations” (p. 295 and 278 respectively), which, in their combination, evince a striking resistance to what Riedel calls “education,” “enlightenment” and “social progress.”

For substantiating this assertion, Riedel draws on quite different ethnographic materials collated during several months of fieldwork in Ghana. These include witchcraft-related storybooks and films and a widespread and widely exploited rumour about occult rituals behind Ghanaian internet-based fraud (the so-called *Sakawa*-rumour cycle), as well as interviews conducted at different asylums, or “ghettos,” for witch-hunt victims in Ghana’s northern regions. These materials are analysed mainly by means of critical theory, expanding in particular on Adorno and Horkheimer’s *Dialectics of Enlightenment* and their arguments about the culture industry and Adorno’s take on secondary superstition-cum-occultism in the West, as well as by ways of psychoanalytical approaches to media contents, in turn influenced by Freudian psychology.

The book is divided into three principal parts, which mainly follow the classical German PhD thesis structure comprising a literature review, a discussion of methodology, and the results. Part 1, then, discusses in great detail the relevant literature and, in doing so, establishes the book’s theoretical outline. Going all the way from Frazer, Mauss and Evans-Prichard to Lévy-Bruhl and back to Malinowski, this part provides a comprehensive survey and critique of witchcraft studies in Africa and beyond. It renders many interesting remarks on how scholars have approached and tried to explain witchcraft. Owing to its exhaustiveness and the author’s illuminating and indeed also

impressive command of related debates, parts of it might even be useful for graduate courses on witchcraft and sorcery. The great generality of the discussion, however, also obscures a clear development of the author's own questions and concepts. Indeed, at times it reads more like a textbook than a thesis-turned-monograph. While most of the more prominent Africanist witchcraft studies are discussed in detail, the perhaps most authoritative, contemporary study, Geschiere's 1997 *Modernity of Witchcraft*, merely gets a passing nod but is not discussed at all. This omission is especially surprising as Riedel fiercely argues against the "modernity"-thesis.

Following a reflection of fieldwork methods and the collection of ethnographic materials in part 2, part 3 presents the results, which are divided into three main sections. The first section analyses several popular storybooks and films that depict witchcraft practices and which Riedel subsumes under the label of "propaganda" (p. 159). The closely related second section reconstructs the development of the *Sakawa*-rumours – based on the idea of occult rituals being used for cyber-fraud by spiritually manipulating victims, mainly Western internet users, and attends to various fictionalised variations of the rumours in films. While the selection of written and visual materials collected and discussed in these two sections is intriguing, the analysis, for which Riedel heavily draws on ideas from depth psychology, appears strangely disconnected from the contexts of its local audiences. More often than not, we read Riedel's own, and thus etc, interpretations of the books and films, but only sporadically do we learn about what local readers and viewers make of them and which emic meanings are invested in their contents. This kind of psychoanalytical interpretation of media-contents, though highly evocative in its reach, keeps the two sections at a rather clear distance from how an anthropological analysis of witchcraft representations in Ghanaian popular culture would look like.

The last results section departs from the analysis presented in the first two sections, both content-wise and geographically. For, while the two preceding discussions were drawn from fieldwork conducted among storybook and film distributors in a coastal town in Ghana's south, the third section turns to the asylums for witch-hunt victims in Ghana's north, where witchcraft books and films are largely absent. Ethnographically, this is the most interesting part of the book. Based

on short-term visits to nine such asylums and 150 interviews with the mostly older women who found refuge in them, though most of them not voluntarily, it presents detailed descriptions of the asylums as established institutions, in which earth-shrines provide shelter while simultaneously serving as places of exorcism. It furthermore discusses the roles of the “earth priests” and of the witchcraft ordeals they perform.

In the later part of this section, Riedel revisits some of the common factors cited for explaining witchcraft beliefs and accusations (e.g. misogyny, patriarchy, exogamy, social levelling, deviancy, epidemics, “modernity”) and contrasts them to the testimonies of the witch-hunt victims. In his account, none of the factors proved sufficient for explaining the accusations and “hunts” that the victimised women endured. Citing Ashforth, he thus concludes that “Anyone can be a witch” (p. 291), irrespective of external factors, such as social, material and economic conditions. Riedel’s attempt to bring into focus the personal tragedies of, and potential remedies for, witch-hunt victims is commendable, and adds an important yet neglected perspective to the discussion. Sadly, the description in this section depends virtually entirely on broad generalisation. Parts of selected interviews are reproduced in the appendix, but the discussion rarely gives voice to the women themselves, it introduces no particular characters as examples and, in parallel to the two earlier sections, leaves the reader mainly with Riedel’s elaborate yet his own own arguments and explanations.

Riedel’s book is an eclectic work. Some of its parts work well on their own and make a worthy contribution to broader questions about witchcraft beliefs and accusations and to the anthropological study of witchcraft more broadly. Overall, however, the main parts of the book appear rather disconnected and lack an effective structure that often makes it hard for the reader to follow the main argument, and to find it convincing. The book’s principal achievement is that it draws attention to the victims of witchcraft accusations, which in the by now large body of related literature appears conspicuously absent. This, in my view, the most significant aspect of the book could have been elaborated much more, not least as the author appears to have far more material on the lives, perspectives and afflictions of witch-hunt

victims than he included in this book. He did, however, set a valuable path for future research.

Michael Stasik

Devisch, Rene. 2017. *Body and Affect in the Intercultural Encounter*. Bamenda, Cameroon: Langaa / Leiden: African Studies Centre. ISBN-10: 9956-764-01-9; ISBN-13: 978-9956-764-01-3. xvii + 308 pp.

This book makes a profound attempt to understand and explicate African notions of the body as well as interbodily, intersubjective and cosmocentric modalities. The book is timely and valuable in a number of respects: first, in its focus on interbodily, intersubjective and cosmocentric modalities the book contributes to critiques of the Western imposition of individualistic notions on otherwise collectivistic African cultures. In this sense, the book contributes insights to discourses around African Ubuntu and its underlying collectivism. Second, in its focus on interbodiliness and the topical notion of “affect” the book contributes insights from contemporary Western philosophy that is premised on speculative realism and relationality. However, unlike abstract scholarly philosophical works that often engage in discourses on the body and affect *in abstractu*, Rene Devisch’s book is premised on his long immersion in the African Yakaphones’ activities and thoughts systems. Based on the author’s lengthy stay with the Yakaphones, the book engages with the intricate and intriguing African practices of and perspectives on healing cults, sorcery and rituals. While carefully explicating the Yakaphones’ practices, Devisch exposes ways in which Africans are woven in terms of the body-group-world weave within which there are various forms of reciprocity, co-resonance and co-naturality of life forms in the African universe.

In chapters one and two, which build on the author’s long ethnographic experience including participant observation among the Yakaphones, readers are informed about how researchers can weave themselves in their informants’ universes, how they can observe the everyday lives of their hosts and how they can share the sensory