

choose whom they married (or whether they wanted to marry at all), and they employed their new skills in teaching and medicine. But it was also repressive, for it moulded them into 'virtuous Christian wives' who would remain in the household to work without remuneration. The sexual threat was posed with the extension of their roles as domestics by bringing them into European homes to work. The actual question of whether to allow this was hotly debated in European circles, often between men and women, as the 'Yellow Peril' (miscegenation between European men and African women) was seen as another threat to the fragment of European society in Africa.

Although Schmidt's book does lack a certain amount of theory and tends to oversimplify the role of the colonial state, these are minor criticisms when one looks at its real value. The obvious merits are the depth of the research and such fascinating sections as the role of spirit mediums and the sexual threat posed by African women. But, more important, owing to the dearth in women's historiography on colonial Zimbabwe, this will act as a most valuable starting point into future research and will, hopefully, push others into a reappraisal of the formation of the African peasantry.

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I. M. LEWIS, AHMED AL-SAFI AND SAYYID HURREIZ (eds). *Women's Medicine: the zar-bori cult in Africa and beyond*. International African Seminars. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, for the International African Institute, 1991, 309 pp., £40.00, ISBN 0 7486 2061 5.

This book comprises a selection of fifteen papers presented at an International African Seminar in 1988 in Khartoum. *Zar-bori* cults may best be viewed as 'cults of affliction', to use Victor Turner's term, which involve states of spirit possession. *Zar* is found in North Africa, including the Horn of Africa, and in the Middle East, while *bori* is practised in West Africa, particularly in northern Nigeria and Niger. Most contributors to the book see *zar* and *bori* as typical women's cults, but men may also play an important role in them.

In his introduction Lewis calls the *zar-bori* cults 'a tantalising given', both in the ethnographic present and in the past (p. 10). Having read the fifteen case studies which follow, I can only affirm his statement. His introduction is an admirable attempt to put order in the enormous variety of observations and interpretations produced by the authors.

Lewis starts by juxtaposing casting out spirits and pleasing or appeasing them. Exorcism is one method of dealing with possession; 'adorcism' (paying cult to the spirit) is another. *Zar* and *bori* are examples of the latter type (if you can't beat them, join them), although some authors seem to deviate from this general distinction.

The interesting thing about *zar* and *bori* is that they occur over an extremely wide area in Africa and the Middle East and their existence was reported as early as the beginning of the nineteenth century. A plausible explanation for their widespread distribution lies in the contact between different Islamic peoples through long-distance trade, war and the yearly Mecca pilgrimage. These geographical and historical aspects of *zar* and *bori* and the abundant literature about them made these cults a rewarding topic for an international seminar.

Some of the authors explore the historical links between *zar* and *bori* and investigate whether they can indeed be regarded as one religious complex. Most of them admit they cannot get much further than intelligent guesses that such links did indeed exist.

Lewis – and several others – suggest that *zar* and *bori* are an expression and index of role conflict in the lives of women, usually in the domestic domain. The common social factor, according to Lewis, appears to be ‘the experience of identity-threatening stress, exacerbated by conditions of confinement and exclusion’ (p. 10). The cult should then be interpreted as a healing ritual enabling women to re-enact their experiences and to win back their identity. The underlying cause of their crises is male domination, leading to feelings of guilt and stress among women, who in one way or another fail to live up to what is expected of them. The selected papers show that such crises occur under very different conditions, among the rich and the poor, in rural communities as well as in the city.

The relationship between *zar-bori* and Islam is ambiguous and uneasy. Some describe *zar-bori* as an integrated and syncretised popularisation of Islam, others report that it is constantly condemned and rejected as irreconcilable with Islam.

What *zar-bori* means to women who take part in it is a moot question. Some authors take the view that it is essentially conservative and palliative. The cult enables women to adjust to their living conditions and accept them without changing them. Others suggest a more radical role: *zar-bori* functions as a vehicle of social protest and mobilises people. It may then lead to real improvements in the lives of women. Lewis takes a rather gloomy view of the effect of the cult. To him it is first and foremost ‘a means of coping with life within the existing social parameters’ (p. 5). As a ‘women’s medicine’ it does not cure; it alleviates. It is an aspirin for which one may have to pay dear.

The different case studies vary in quality. One deals with Ethiopia, from where we have the oldest references to *zar*, three are about *bori* among the Hausa in Nigeria and Niger, six deal with Sudan and five with North Africa (Somalia, Egypt, Tunisia) and the Middle East (Kuwait). Kuwait’s case is an intriguing one, as it is the farthest country in geographical, and socio-cultural terms. It is one of the richest countries in the world. Zubaydah Ashkanani writes that the stress on Kuwaiti women is due to the fact that they are excluded from the opportunities which their husbands have and at the same time are deprived of links with the traditional community. In the *Zar* sessions they bring the old values of the community back to life and find comfort in them.

The last chapter of the book is a useful bibliography with extensive annotation of 106 entries about *zar* and *bori*.

The main themes of the book are the social context and historical background of *zar* and *bori*. The authors have clearly been inspired by Lewis’s path-breaking study *Ecstatic Religion*, in which he links spirit possession with ‘deprivation theory’ and draws the – now almost classic – distinction between ‘central’ and ‘peripheral’ cults.

There are many more anthropological questions which can be asked about possession. What possession/trance is, exactly, how it is brought about, and how it is related to music, for example, are, issues which have sparked off a lively debate between ethnomusicologists, psychologists and anthropologists (Neher, Besmer, Rouget, Erlmann). These questions are not discussed in the book despite the prominent place of music and trance in *zar* and *bori*.

The focus on *zar* and *bori* as historically related cults and their presentation as one religious complex raises a question. Why have *Zar* and *Bori* been selected and treated as related phenomena when trance and spirit possession seem to be a common feature of almost any African relation – not to speak of other continents? The first collection of papers on spirit possession in Africa, by Beattie and Middleton (1969), and Lewis’s own book demonstrate this. So why did the editors not discuss the possibility of *zar* and *bori* being part of a much wider religious ‘complex’? Studies of both traditional and Christian cults of affliction in West, East, Central and southern Africa describe similar forms of ecstasy and raise the same questions about the social origin and

therapeutic function of possession. They call for a wider discussion of spirit possession in African religion. In fact the closing remarks of Lewis's introduction already take a much broader view: 'beliefs in marginal spiritual forces . . . constitute a spiritual reservoir (frequently updated) which can be drawn upon to respond to the experience of affliction and stress in ways which make this meaningful to the victims and their families. Only when people cease to believe in spirits does recourse to them become ineffective and, fundamentally, irrational and therefore a sign of detachment from reality' (p. 16).

Examples from Kuwait, Malaysia (cf. Ong's study of spirit possession in a modern factor) and Japan suggest, however, that spirit possession is not likely to be ousted easily by 'modernisation' and 'technological development'. It seems, rather, to gain momentum in the face of incisive social and cultural change. The reported upsurge of witchcraft belief in Africa's colonial era comes to mind as a possible parallel. The exploration of this development would be a worthwhile topic for a future conference on *zar*, *bori* and other traditions of spirit possession in Africa.

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KAREN TRANBERG HANSEN, *African Encounters with Domesticity*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1992, 321 pp., \$42.00, ISBN 0 18135 1803 2 hard covers, \$16.00, ISBN 0 2135 1804 0 paperback.

This book consists of essays examining the formation of specific indigenous forms of African domesticity during the twentieth century. The process began during the colonial era when local ideas of domesticity encountered selective Western forms imposed by colonial authorities and missionaries. This encounter inspired struggles over the content and meaning of domesticity and contributed to changing relations between genders, races and classes from the onset of colonial rule to the present day.

The approach of the volume is that of the new scholarship in history. As the editor, defines it, this means shifting the emphasis from the study of great men to the study of everyday objects, routines and rituals while at the same time viewing colonised Africans as assuming a pro-active role in the transforming struggles of the colonial encounter.

One of these areas of everyday life which previous scholars of Africa have failed to analyse has been that of domesticity. Hansen attributes this to a variety of conceptual blinkers and misconceptions. Firstly, feminist scholars have preferred to concentrate on African women's economic roles. This, coupled with scholarly preoccupation with dichotomies (in this case those of public/private and production/reproduction) has masked the importance of the domestic realm in historical and ethnographic studies of Africa.

Many of the articles adopt an historical perspective on the issue, delving back into the colonial records to determine the ideology and practice surrounding various attempts to restructure African domesticity and the response of African men and women to the enforced changes. Certain articles examine a specific moment in colonialism: the Comaroffs examine this process as one in which 'there was in southern Africa's dialectic of domesticity, a simultaneous, mutually sustaining process of cultural reconstruction [of domesticity] at home and abroad' (p. 40). Denzer's article looks at domestic science training in colonial Yorubaland, as does Musisi's on colonial Uganda. Both see this form of education as playing an important role in defining domesticity in post-independence Uganda. In one of the theoretically most complex