

book is hermeneutically open and suggests a strong humanist tendency, Pelton's scholarship is rigorous and engaging.

Karen McCarthy Brown. *Moma Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991. Pp. x + 405, illustrations, glossary, bibliography, index. \$24.95, cloth.

Jim Wafer. *The Taste of Blood: Spirit Possession in Brazilian Condomblé*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. xiii + 219, glossary, bibliography, index. \$29.95, cloth; \$12.95, paper.

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Since the publication of *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (1986), much scholarly attention has focused on the realities and problems of "doing ethnography"; the essays in this volume offer a myriad of critiques of ethnographic research and suggestions for its amelioration. This year has brought the publication of two significant works that reflect the new environment in which the writing of culture transpires. Karen McCarthy Brown's *Moma Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn* represents an important attempt at this work. The book explores an Afro-Haitian woman's life as she "serves the spirits" of Vodou. Each chapter focuses on a major spirit; these chapters are framed by longer, fictionalized versions of stories told in Moma Lola's family. Thus, while the introduction describes the book as an "intimate spiritual biography" (p. ix), the weaving together of the stories and the more descriptive chapters create a fascinating and informative text: a biography of Moma Lola, a portrait of her family as they serve the spirits, and an exposition of the Vodou pantheon.

Based on almost twenty years of research, the book does offer many intimate portraits of the interaction between Moma Lola and the spirits. For example, Chapter Four explores the male spirit called *Ogou*. For Brown, the self-assured and determined *Ogou* is a metaphor for the ways in which Haitians adapt to life in the United States; the chapter presents the details of Moma Lola's family life as it copes with a major disruption. Moma Lola's adult son, William, suffered brain damage during a childhood bout of meningitis; in 1981, he was arrested for purse snatching. First, the family became listless and withdrawn, but, as time passed, Moma Lola and her daughter Maggie developed strategies to cope with this crisis. Despite their fear of the government, instilled during years of life in Haiti, both women used *Ogou* to address the problem at hand. Together they worked *Ogou* for William's release. Brown unfolds this instance of *Ogou*'s power among a series of other interesting examples of the spirit's personality and potential, including songs sung in his honor and a description of her own ritual marriage to the deity in 1980. Extremely personal

cases like these clarify the role of the spirits in daily life and depict their importance to the people who serve them. Rarely does a book so vividly portray the richness and complexity of religious life; rarer still is the book that shows strong women acting as healers and leaders in their communities.

The book also demonstrates the importance of presenting both the general structure of the folk traditions and ways in which those traditions are actually practiced. Chapter Twelve presents the outline of Moma Lola's spiritual healing practice. Addressing the spirits called the *Gede*, the tricksters of the Vodou pantheon, this chapter explores the structure of diagnosing and treating disease, both social and physical. The essay alternates between describing a series of healing sessions in Jamaica and general commentary about Moma Lola's practice. Here, the dynamic between tradition and individual creativity is clearly demonstrated.

The family stories that frame the chapters are intriguing. The narratives are well-crafted and fit nicely with the chapters they introduce; they do illuminate the nature of Moma Lola's family and their connections to the spirits. However, folklorists may find the tales unsatisfying; the text could have been more instructive had it included both Brown's fictionalized versions of the narratives as well as the original versions. The author does give partial transcriptions of a few storytelling events; when outlining an much-told story about an illness that Maggie suffered, Brown explains that "the story emerges antiphonally" (p. 227). Folklorists might want to see the oral and antiphonal development of these narratives and might find these embellished stories troubling. Still, the narratives do represent an important attempt to incorporate a great body of history into the text of biography; the narratives do communicate the realities of Moma Lola's family and their involvement with the spirits. Brown has taken a risk: She conveys the reality of religious life and practice; as she struggles to articulate the workings of a different culture, she attempts new strategies and ultimately creates an important new example of how to write ethnography.

Jim Wafer's *The Taste of Blood: Spirit Possession in Brazilian Condo* also succeeds as an innovative ethnography. As he writes about the Afro-Brazilian religious tradition Condo, Wafer consciously complicates the representations and tropes that are essential to the project: A list of participants with a short description of each opens the book; thus, the agents of the book are construed much like the characters in a play. The opening section of the book is a "Pre-text," a series of quotes that underscore the difficulty of creating a fixed text from the fluid lives of real people. Similarly, the first scene of the ethnography describes Wafer's second-to-last night in Brazil and explores the desire that draws spirits and people together.

Wafer reiterates his intention to employ new tropes. He inverts a traditional opening scene in which the ethnographer is welcomed by the "natives"; the book begins at the end of Wafer's experience in the field. This tropic inversion is further complicated by the events of that night in Brazil: A female spirit, possessing a male medium, asks Wafer if he would like to kiss her; he does kiss her. Thus the opening of the book clearly presents the problems that it addresses: representations and the complex interactions between people and spirits in Condo. Using various methods, Wafer successfully alters the traditional representations of the "other" in ethnographic reportage.

Three sections follow the participants and the Pre-text, and each explores a different class of spirits. The first treats *exu* spirits. As well as the narrative about the end of Wafer's trip and his relationship to that particular Exu spirit, this section explores how the author chose his research site, the goals of his research, many stories about the exus, and observations of their behavior. Wafer integrates this material with a grace and style that makes it both intriguing and scintillating.

The second section presents information about the *caboclo* spirits, associated with American Indians, "backwoodsmen," and spirits of the forest. Wafer outlines the relationship between the people who practice Condomblé and the symbol of the Indian; both are marginal in their relationship to the dominant culture of Brazil. The Indian has long been associated with an independent Brazilian nation. Wafer presents a thorough structural outline of the workings of a caboclo festival and examples of the songs used in each part of the event; a description of an actual festival compliments and completes this outline. The possession that is so central to the festival leads Wafer to explore the terms used to discuss trance. Here, Wafer becomes reflexive and explores his own construction and representations of these events. He also explains his own agenda most clearly:

My own approach has been to attempt to create an account of trance from the perspective of "ordinary knowledge." This entails locating particular instances of trance within the events of daily life, and attempting to reproduce the interaction of reason and imagination in the way trance was interpreted by those involved in the events, including myself. (p. 106)

Wafer clearly articulates the importance of the mundane events that frame trance in any interpretation of the experience.

In the final section, the author interacts with the most pure and distant of the spirits, the *orixás*. These deities are less common in their appearances and more formal than the other spirits. Here, the reader encounters an experiential and vivid account of Wafer's initiation as an official in his ritual community. As Wafer rests in seclusion, other members of the community are being initiated in an adjacent room; these people are possessed by the *erês*, the child spirits of the orixás. These spirits are noticeably absent from other ethnographies about Condomblé, as is the orixá Tempo who receives much attention in this section of the book. Here, Wafer skillfully combines his research methodology of ordinary knowledge with a keen awareness of what is missing in the previous documentation of this tradition.

The postface of the text offers a humorous but compelling image of the ethnographic process. When in Brazil, Wafer was nicknamed after a spirit of an ancestor, and here Wafer uses these spirits, who appear masquerading in bulky costumes with small nets for faces, as a metaphor ethnography. He conceives of the participants in his fieldwork as dancing masqueraders; instead of nets for faces, they have more dancing spirits, and those spirits have others dancing as their faces. Thus, inherent in ethnography are representations in an infinite regress of representations and differences. *The Taste of Blood* brilliantly explores both Condomblé and the representations of ethnographic research.

Together Brown's *Moma Lola* and Wafer's *The Taste of Blood* represent important contributions to the growing body of new ethnographies that

problematize research and presentation. Both will serve students of African Diaspora folk religions and the ethnographic process for years to come: They are destined to be enduring classics.