Review
Reviewed Work(s): Anthropologie du christianisme en Océanie by Yanick Fer and Gwendoline Malogne-Fer
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and gendered trends. She argues that mixed-descent families gradually, and especially after 1890, became invisible, were deemed ‘white’ and assimilated enough to disappear into urban centres, whereas they had earlier been ‘a colonial obsession’, sketched, painted, described and photographed. Warning against simplistic notions of progressive integration into a white British culture, Wanhalla lays open tensions and contradictions of this assimilation process, by exploring self-representations of people of mixed ancestry, notions of love, emotional closeness and support, continuing or discontinued ties to both sides of the family. She focuses on the interchange between notions of self and framing discourses, between government pressure and responses to it, be they resistance or compliance. She thus concludes that her book is ‘not really about loss; it is a story of survival’ (p. 161). She concludes with an assertion of the right of people of mixed descent to re-examine and reclaim their Ngāi Tahu culture, overcoming silencing shame in order to embrace their heritage in all its messy wholeness and engage, like their ancestors before, in ongoing transformations. It is an insightful, intellectually rigorous and respectful study, undertaken with the support and encouragement of a number of families of mixed descent. An extensive pictorial record is displayed throughout the book, taken from official government sources and private family photo albums. The images are discussed in the text, enrich the text, and have extensive captions; they thus avoid being caught in some of their former uses: voyeurism and objectification.

Mixed descent remains a political minefield today, especially in settler-dispossessory nations such as New Zealand and Australia. Present Australian legislation awards benefits to Indigenous people for simplifying their heritage, and emphasising Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent and continuity of cultural practices, and denies native title to those who do not comply with this essentialising enterprise. Australian language use in the public arena is mostly overwhelmingly careful, e.g. ‘Arrernte man of Irish heritage’ or ‘Larrakia woman of diverse ethnic background’. This contrasts with different notions of identity and mixed descent in other parts of our region. In a speech to a German audience in Berlin, the Samoan politician and writer Misa Telefoni Retzlaff, for example, set out his lineage, explained that his uncle had died fighting in the German army during World War II, but that he was Samoan, not German, and as such could have claimed family lands in Eastern Europe, which by treaty is denied German nationals:

I am Misa Telefoni, Deputy Prime Minister of Samoa. I was born Hermann Theodor Retzlaff on 21 May 1952 in Apia. I try to keep these two alter-egos as separate as I can. I publish my novel ‘love and money’ as H.T. Retzlaff — but when I attend international fora it is always as Misa Telefoni Retzlaff, and Invitations in our name go out from Honourable Misa Telefoni and Mrs. Sarah Retzlaff.

Wanhalla has written with warmth and respect about ‘mixed-descent’ families and, by analysing transformations of self-understanding and self-representation, has enriched and challenged not only my vocabulary, but sharpened my eyes in regard to developments in Australia as well as the Pacific. Wanhalla states that ‘in other colonial settings, the role of interracial relationships in forging new societies has been explored in great detail’, but that her book fills a need in New Zealand to go beyond a historical discourse framed by ‘Māori-government–settler interaction’ (p. 11). In her humbleness, the author underestimates the need for her study well beyond New Zealand. I would recommend it warmly to scholars interested not only in issues of descent, heritage and cultural transformation, but in Pacific colonialism and its legacies in general.

CHRISTINE WINTER
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Most of the independent states of the Pacific ground their national identity on Christian principles; while the French Pacific collectivités (New Caledonia, French Polynesia and Wallis and Futuna) attribute a place to religion which would be unimaginable in metropolitan France. With such an opening, the two editors of Anthropologie du christianisme en Océanie aim at decentring the perspective of readers accustomed to associating Pacific Islands with contexts of local and traditional forms.
of religion. They argue that religion is a charged area in contemporary Oceania which must be placed and kept in the front stage.

In the volume’s Introduction, Fer and Malogne-Fer point out that Christianity emerges as one of the essential dimensions for understanding the processes of change and continuity advocated and practised by the contemporary Oceanian societies. They attempt to trace the dead ground, the exclusions and omissions in the description of contemporary contexts, while seeking to highlight the reasons underlying the indifference or hostility of most anthropologists, who have not considered new/old forms of Christianity throughout the Pacific as a legitimate anthropological object, inasmuch as it is (to them) both familiar and incomprehensible. In particular, ‘historical Protestant and Catholic Churches, undoubtedly too “ordinary” for considering them really worth of attention’ (p. 18). What has been considered ‘good to think’ for anthropologists has mattered more than what is ‘good to think’ for local people. The editors also bring a reflexive stance vis-à-vis their academic (French) background, but in a dialogue with instances that are connected to other (mainly) English speaking academic milieux. This very productive approach will hopefully infuse other research areas in Oceania.

The specific objective of the volume is to trace the variety of Christianities in Oceania; drawing on ethnographic and/or archival sources, each of the seven authors explores the connections of Christianity as people of different societies of the region engage with it: a flow of trajectories enmeshing cultural, political and historical elements. The four articles that constitute the first part of the book (‘Missions, Churches and Politics’) relate researches focusing on different topics, but they all point to the centrality of the entanglement of missions—churches—politics in understanding present-day Tahiti, Vanuatu, Fiji and Pacific Islanders in New Zealand.

Vahi Sylvia Tuheiava-Richaud approaches the London Missionary Society codes of laws established between 1819 and 1838 in Tahiti, before it became a French protectorate (1842). The implementation of missionary codes was made possible through a combined effort by London Missionary Society missionaries and some high-rank chiefs. The author argues that the first code of laws represented a break with local traditional concepts of power. The code vested political power over several islands in a supreme chief, to whom God (te Atua) bestowed mana, essential to ruling. Thus, the missionary’s support became decisive in granting the chief’s access to the essential divine mana. The author examines the codes’ impact on Polynesian society of the time, first the moral and religious facets, then the legal one, and the repercussions on land ownership and land tenure, and finally the economic consequences. Tuheiava-Richaud points out that the practice of consigning decisions concerning land boundaries to a specific register will undermine the power of the spoken word. But she also stresses the research values of such sources, which should be approached looking for clues to understanding the values and ways of thinking of the two cultures that came into contact.

The next contribution by Eric Witthersheim examines the relations between colonial powers and missions in Vanuatu, an atypical colonial context for its jointly British and French administration. A situation further complicated by the presence of French Catholic and British Protestant missions. The article focuses on the issue of the formation of a local political elite and of an indigenous clergy, an endeavour which was carried out by the British but resisted by the French. The author shows how the question of the formation of a local clergy has always been vital in other missionary contexts, and yet in Vanuatu it was fought by the catholic hierarchy: the first Melanesian priests were ordained only after World War II. The war in fact is considered as representing a true ‘break’, in this case by making the missionaries aware that these lands would one day become independent.

The myopia of a colonial policy carried out by the French administration as well as by the Catholic hierarchy which denied local people access to a better tertiary education and resisted the formation of a clergy was rhetorically played upon in the 1970s to justify the unpreparedness of the country for independence. These contradiction are brought to the fore by the author through the figure of the catholic priest Gérard Leymang (1937–2002), whose trajectory is quite revealing: he moved from being a forerunner of independence to a supporter of francophonie in the Pacific.

Witthersheim avoids the risk of typifying a francophone/anglophone rupture by keeping all these distinctions on the move and by pointing out that different colonial philosophies impinge in the contemporary situation, and yet one should not go as far as stating that British colonialism was more respectful of local contexts; further, he states that today other distinctions are emerging as important, although he does not elaborate upon them.
Translated from English (by M. Benguigui), Jacqueline Ryle’s paper takes us to Fiji and to the question of the inscription of Christian values in the new Fijian constitution. The three pillars of Fijian society — *vunua* (land, tradition, kinship), *lotu* (Church) and *malanitu* (authority) — constituted the main ideology during the colonial era (1874–1970). How is this idealised structure interpreted today in the light of the new constitution? The question whether the Fijian way is something old or new does not interest the author as much as attempting to understand the place it occupies in contemporary Fijian politics. In this case, the emphasis is on the political usage of Christian values. Complex dynamics and tensions between processes of changes and continuity emerge in this chapter. Both mainstream local churches and pentecostal churches mobilise religion and tradition to legitimate a specific relation between people and land. The strong link between Christianity and local people is further reinforced to produce a double exclusion: in terms of cultural and religious specificities.

Gwendoline Malonge-Fer’s article on Pacific Islander women who become pastors in the migratory New Zealander context concludes part one. The paper intersects several dimensions: policies of the different churches in New Zealand and in the different Island countries, for example women’s access to pastorate; and the different trajectories of female pastors. The authors point out the difficulties that a woman encounters in recognising her vocation, the obstacles she experiences in entering theological school, and later in being appointed to a parish. Indeed, what emerges from the women’s narratives is very rich. The women interviewed distance themselves from the label ‘feminist’, to which they prefer that of ‘womanist’, to differentiate themselves from their white counterparts; and yet when it comes to pastoral practice, they stress *pastoral care* as their distinguishing female approach *vis-à-vis* that of male Pacific Islander pastors.

I found this contribution rich and fresh, yet I do not follow the author when she affirms that it is *‘paradoxe’* (p. 118) that women stressing a different pastoral practice establish their legitimacy by mobilising a register — that of maternity — which they have renounced in accessing the pastoral ministry. Her argument restricts maternity to generating children. Maternity can also be symbolic. The concept of symbolic maternity elaborated by the Italian feminism of difference in the 1990s argues that a woman can choose to forego being a mother in its more traditional sense, but at the same time she can experience maternity in a symbolic sense, thus generating a political practice (see Luisa Muraro and her concept of ‘the symbolic order of the mother’).

The second part of the book — ‘Conversion, Prayer and Healing’ — opens with a contribution by John Barker, whose studies on Christian Churches in the Pacific Islands has pioneered a way. In his contribution (translated by Y. Fer), Barker presents his return to his fieldwork area in the second half of the 1990s. He examines the impact of forms of charismatic Christianity among the Maisin in the village of Uiaku (Papua New Guinea). He considers that, although the forms are new, the concerns show continuity with the past: eradicating sorcery and promoting health through the connections between morality–sickness–healing, although he observes a shift in the way people conceive of the processes of sickness/healing. The communal concerns are moving towards a more individualistic stance: healing is not the result, as in the past, of reinforcing the relationship with the community; instead a new trend is emerging, that of considering healing as the result of a declared and practised commitment to God. Barker, as usual, goes beyond a simplistic and ordered restitution of his rich material: he does not contrast indigenous and Western cultures, old and new ways. *He* argues for the emergence from this entanglement of a different ‘object’ which is not just a combination of the two distinct dimensions — continuity and change — but a continuous transformation of their interplay. John Barker’s constructive approach brings to mind Roland Barthes’s legacy on interdisciplinary work, which cannot be accomplished by choosing a subject and gathering a few sciences around it. Interdisciplinary activity consists in creating a new object and a new language, neither of which belongs to the conventional surveyed disciplines.

The voyage continues with Yannick Fer taking us to the French Polynesia, where he examines some trajectories of conversions to Pentecostal Churches in the early 2000s within a larger framework which brings into the picture cultural–social–religious dimensions. In one of the cases he examines, conversion to a new Church is advocated in terms of a symbolic shift from one community (the extended family) to another (the brother and the sisters of the church). It is not a real break from community life, rather it is a symbolic change. The interviewees consider themselves as belonging to a new church not to a new religion. Although the individual choice is at the core of these narratives, each of those examined stress, to different degrees, cultural continuity, a need to ‘go back to the sources’ or a need for dealing with the changes affecting local society.
Yannick Fer alerts us of the difficulties and methodological questions for an anthropology of contemporary Christianity in Oceania which needs to ‘maximize the angles of analysis to capture cultural logics, social determinants and individual strategies implied in these religious commitments ...’ (p. 166). I should say that, although the author introduces his argument by proposing a study centred around ideals-types (p. 150), he presents a very lively and dynamic picture of present-day conversion within the Pentecost Church which can hardly be pigeonholed.

Joel Robbins’s contribution on the Urapmin of PNG (translated by M. Salain) closes this edited collection. Robbins confronts modern linguistic ideology with the ideas on language held by the Urapmin, a small Highlands group. To them, action is valued much more than words, to which they attribute very little reliability. In the context of conversion to charismatic Christianity in the late 1970s, praying has become an everyday practice for this group. To them, rituals are actions, and praying is considered primarily a ritual rather than a discourse. Prayers thus inhere not just in words but in action as well, thus enabling people to commit themselves. Praying today performs the same function as rituals did in the past. But what could appear as a substitution of one medium by another is shuffled by the last consideration of the author, which somehow obliges the reader to go back to the beginning of the chapter. The role of mediation in communication, minimised by modern linguistics, is what makes Urapmin’s interpretation of modernity original, and their modernity a local one.

Anthropologie du christianisme en Océanie is a welcome collection on Christianity in Oceania which brings together specialists of different areas of the region, from different academic traditions and of different generations. The essays in this volume approach the theme of the diversity of Christianity in Oceania by looking at its intersection with local experiences of colonial histories and redeployment in everyday contemporary practice. What links them is that they address Pacific societies today, all facing the necessity to take new processes into account; and they prove that this can be done through fieldwork in rural as well as in urban areas or transnational situations. If anthropology has for a long time marginalised processes connected to Christianity, today it is not possible to deal with contemporary societies without taking into account the different shapes that Christianity has taken in the hands and in the lives of Pacific Islanders.

The contributors do not fall into the trap of trying to recover elements of continuity at all costs, nor are they dazzled by change. Yet complexity and entanglement emerge in each contribution. Most open up more questions than they answer, but they all respond to the request for a new departure advocated in the editors’ introduction — to good effect.

ANNA PAINI
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The cover image of this book shows an undulating string of narrow palm-covered islets narrowing off into a distant line of white wave break. From this aerial view, it is clear that the coral islets are themselves just high points on the reef, balanced between the deep blue of the open sea and the lagoon’s green-to-turquoise shadings. Sandy beaches fringe the low islands, contrasting with the brown sweep of ocean-side reef and the narrow strip of palms rising between them. This photograph, together with the 123 others inside the book, evocatively capture Tuvalu’s atoll environment in all its beauty, fragility and uniqueness. The special threat that global climate change now poses to these islands makes this publication timely, not only for readers with special interest in Tuvalu’s ecology and history, but also for others with activist intentions or simply a fascination with atoll ecology. This ‘floating world’ is clearly as endangered as it is beautiful.

The book is organised into eight themed chapters, each with an introduction contextualising and explaining the significance of the photographs which follow. The result is a broad visual overview of material aspects of Tuvaluan life. Chapter topics include the Royal Society’s Coral Reef Boring Expedition to Funafuti in 1896, environmental modifications resulting from World War II at Funafuti, Nanumea and Nukufetau, damage from storms and cyclones,