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Spirits and Trance in Brazil. An Anthropology of Religious Experience by Bettina E. Schmidt (review)

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interchangeably. The meaning and definition of *zuqun* and *minzu* mean quite different things in China, where politics, ethics and justice are involved in addition to scholarship.

On the whole this book makes a contribution to our understanding of Chinese cultures. As a fine and valuable piece of historical and ethnographic study, it is worth reading in every sense.

Naran Bilik, Fudan University, Shanghai

Spirits and Trance in Brazil. An Anthropology of Religious Experience. By Bettina E. Schmidt. Bloomsbury, 2016. 226 pages. £102.60; ebook available.

Bettina E. Schmidt's current study tackles an important question about spirits, trance, and mediumship—how do we deal with differing interpretations of these experiences? Prioritizing context, Schmidt looks at spirit possession as a “deictic term, hence to provincialize the experience by embracing locally specific structures” (3). By doing so, Schmidt hopes to reconcile differing explanations embraced among scholars and between scholars and “experiencers.” In Brazil, those who frequent spirit possession trance religions offer many explanations of the experience and move freely between the various traditions themselves. They recognize contextual differences in spirit possession as they travel from tradition to tradition that scholars have often glossed over in favor of more universalistic explanations or categories. For example, there is the use of possession or altered states of consciousness to describe baptism in the Holy Ghost as experienced by charismatic Christians, who prefer to use terms such as “inspiration” or “divine vision” when discussing this experience (9); or kardec spiritists and umbandists who use mediumship, trance, and incorporation to describe the experience (10).

Seeing spirit possession as a deictic term avoids what Schmidt says is one of the central conflicts faced by anthropologists and other scholars who seek to understand this phenomenon from the worldview of their consultants. From the perspective of insiders who experience and interact with spirits, there is no question that they are real. However, the outsider who may not believe in the existence of spirits must explain this behavior and belief and often does so from the outlook that the scientific explanation must supersede that of the insider. Schmidt believes that in Brazil the acceptance of paranormal phenomena is more common. Cultural context is key here. When working in an environment where there is wide acceptance of paranormal occurrences, and when the researcher seeks to understand the insider's approach, it can be useful to both not believe and believe simultaneously. Both the

outsider's and the insider's explanations can coexist and advance understanding of spirit possession.

Schmidt focuses on "how the relationship between human and non-human beings is maintained" (187). Moving away from trying to provide a universalistic definition of spirit possession, one that fits all situations and is impossible to do, Schmidt can "concentrate on what people do—their practices—and how they interpret the experience" (187). In chapters 2 and 3, Schmidt looks at gender roles and racial stratification as social features of possession practice within a changing social frame. Key to the enduring relationship between human and nonhuman beings is the perception of the ontology of the possessing agencies. Schmidt successfully demonstrates how the meaning of the human and non-human interaction depends on the changing historical and social conditions in which it is embedded.

Finally, Schmidt broadens the framework in which we analyze spirit possession to include "physical elements as well as cultural ones" (188). In her fourth chapter she considers the "agency of the mediums, cognition and embodiment" (188). She writes that "possession practice cannot be understood . . . without taking the body into account" (188). Body includes not only "the brain or blood components but the whole body" (188). Dance and speech traditions form an essential part of human and nonhuman communication and they are "performed in distinct ways depending on the tradition, the community, the situation (time and place) and function" (188).

This book offers a broad framework within which to understand spirit possession. Schmidt brings together a number of different disciplinary approaches, and provides a fresh examination to studies in this fascinating field. This is a valuable book for undergraduate and graduate courses, as well as for those looking for a way to understand spirit possession that bridges older and recent perspectives and puts them into a model useful for research into this fascinating topic. I highly recommend the book.

Patricia Lerch, University of North Carolina–Wilmington

Pagan Ethics: Paganism as a World Religion. By Michael York. Springer, 2016. xiii + 434 pages. \$249.00 cloth; ebook available.

Pagan Ethics is the second in a proposed trilogy that began with *Pagan Theology: Paganism as a World Religion* (New York University Press, 2003). The fact that these works are overtly theological makes them difficult to review under the normal criteria with which we might discuss studies of new religious movements. Like its predecessor, *Pagan Ethics* is an academic work, written by a (retired) professional scholar, and