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ubiquitous medicine person (*nganga*) in Bantu-speaking areas offers a possible christological paradigm for Africa. His shift in missionary focus, away from monotheism to what is specific to Christianity, that is, Christ, is refreshing. But as he rightly suspects, Church authorities might be wary of canonizing the image of the local *nganga*, which in the past they had reviled as the epitome of the devil. This derogatory attitude towards African ways of knowing and healing is radically reversed in the work of Abimbola, a Yoruba expert on Ifa divination. He internalizes a Western theological discourse through which he expounds the vast corpus of Ifa oral literature as a coherent cosmological system. This is an indigenous metadiscourse, perhaps as perplexing to the ordinary *babalawo* diviner-healers and their clients as Thomas Aquinas's use of Aristotelian philosophy was arcane to medieval Christians. But Abimbola's reinterpretation of Ifa is also a sign of the times as it becomes further transformed by a whole new generation of Nigerian intellectuals.

MacGaffey's chapter on Kimbanguism, Fabian's on Jamaa, and Ranger's on the American Methodist Episcopal Church in Zimbabwe also pursue the theme of transculturation, but with special reference to the interweaving of religion with politics and other spheres of action. Of particular interest here are the asymmetries that characterize the relationships between religions (the Catholic Church versus Kimbanguism or Jamaa in Zaire), or between American Methodist missionaries and Zimbabwean Methodist converts.

With such a disparity of topics and approaches readers will no doubt pick and choose their way through this volume. But collectively these papers are a welcome addition to our African library. The editors should be commended for their thoughtful introductory essay which is brimming with stimulating ideas for further research.

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BULLETIN OF THE INTERNATIONAL STRING FIGURE ASSOCIATION. *Vol. 1.* 160 pp., illus., maps, bibliogrs. Pasadena: International String Figure Association, 1994.

Playing is a universal feature of human (and other higher primate) behaviour. Play reflects the culture in which it occurs, but some games are universal. String figures – designs woven on the hands with a loop of string – belong to this category of universal games; they are played by peoples in completely different cultures all over the world. In 1902, the anthropologists W.H.R. Rivers and A.C. Haddon proposed 'A method of recording string figures and tricks' (*Man* 2, 146-53), and in 1906 C.F. Jayne published her book *String figures* (1962, *String figures and how to make them*, New York: Dover) which stand-

ardized descriptions of these figures. Within anthropology the study of string figures has become peripheral, although string figure designs are used to portray many concrete and abstract concepts and thus codify cultural knowledge with respect to mythology, folklore, behaviour patterns, skills and societal values. In 1978 Philip Noble and Hiroshi Noguchi founded the 'International String Figure Association'. The ISFA encourages research in string figures and has published its results in nineteen volumes of the *Bulletin of String Figures Association*. The Bulletin under review here replaces this earlier periodical.

In the instructions to authors (p. 160), the editors define their journal as being 'devoted to the publication of original material that advances our understanding and enjoyment of string figures'. The bulletin is structured as follows: Commentaries include 'autobiographical accounts of string figure learning and teaching experiences' and 'accounts of performance arts that incorporate string figures'. Reviews include discussions of 'analyses of regional repertoires' and 'studies describing the distribution of certain techniques or associated lore (myths, taboos etc)'. Research reports 'present new data' on documented or invented designs, 'mathematical analyses of construction method' and 'new nomenclatures for describing construction methods'.

This volume presents five articles, a bibliography on books in print (pp. 151-4), and three letters to the editor. Descriptions of three figures and photographs of eight designs are of interest in Greg Keith's commentary titled 'The presence of string in the postmodern world' (pp. 1-11), a rather personal (very 'postmodern') account of how he became familiar with string figures. Understanding all descriptions in the bulletin requires familiarity with Jayne's publication. Audrey Collinson Small's review article 'Selected string figures, myths and mythmakers' (pp. 12-20) emphasizes the important mnemotechnical function of these designs with respect to mythology. Udo Engelhardt presents six recently invented 'Variations of "Apache Door"' (pp. 22-6), a Native American string figure. Joseph D'Antoni describes 135 newly designed figures documenting 'Variation on Nauru Island figures' (pp. 27-68). He illustrates the inbuilt logic in these designs. The 'String figures from the Austral Islands' collected by John F.G. Strokes, Mark Sherman, with the help of Honor C. Maude, not only describes and illustrates these figures, but also presents three analyses that make this contribution interesting for anthropologists (pp. 69-150). The linguistic analysis of Rapan string figure titles suggests that the figures arrived with the first settlers and the method analysis reveals that the Rapan way of constructing the designs often differs from those in surrounding territories. The distribution analysis shows that

the Rapan repertoire includes figures typical for the Pacific as a whole, figures typical for Polynesia (especially French Polynesia), and figures that are unique to Rapa. The analyses document that 'many features of the Austral string figure repertoire reflect quite accurately what is known about the region from other sources' (p. 143).

This journal is certainly not a general source for anthropologists; however, contributions like the papers by Small and Sherman may offer interesting insights to those who want to take into account the function and power of play within the cultures and for the peoples they study.

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CAMPBELL, HOWARD *et al.* (eds). *Zapotec struggles: histories, politics, and representations from Juchitán, Oaxaca*; poetry translated by Nathaniel Tarn (Smithson. Stud. ethnogr. Inqy). xxvi, 317 pp., illus., bibliogr. Washington, London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993. \$45.00 (cloth), \$19.95 (paper)

Mexico occupies the unique position of having an overt policy of 'indigenism' or the development and use of indigenous culture in the national political arena. Indigenous strength, seen on the murals of Rivera or the pronouncements of Zapata, and today celebrated by many in the uprising of Chiapas, has been a powerful part of the construction of national identity in Mexico. Official rhetoric of a glorious past has often clashed with the realities of poverty, powerlessness and discrimination that characterize the *Mexico profundo* of everyday life. *Zapotec struggles*, a book of essays, reports, stories, poems, interviews, and political statements, fits well into the history of indigenous representation in Mexico. The book is dedicated to and based on a political movement, 'COCEI' or the 'Worker-Peasant-Student Coalition of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec' of Juchitán, Oaxaca. The book mirrors this new political organization, a grass-roots movement that remains conscious of issues like aesthetics and health, even as it is moving into municipal elections and the national democratization process in Mexico today.

The book is divided into four sections and an extensive appendix, and so is something of an encyclopedia of the movement. The editorship of the volume changed several times throughout the development of the volume, and perhaps this shift of editorial control is the reason that the book appears to have been constructed out of a policy of extensive inclusion rather than careful selection.

Part 1 of the volume, 'Histories of conflict, struggle, and mobilization in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec', contains nine sections, beginning with an article by Victor de la Cruz on the representation of indigenous people, 'Indigenous peoples' history (by whom and for whom).' Present-day historians from outside of the

community, de la Cruz notes, are in danger of creating a new syncretism, this one of history rather than religion. The remaining articles of the section are a mix of historic studies of Juchitán in Mexican history, the impact of dam construction and displacement on Isthmus people (by Arturo Warman), as well as a song and a poem.

The second section, 'Representations of the Juchitecos by themselves and others', includes a German account of the area in 1854, an excerpt from a speech by Benito Juárez written in 1850 about Juchitán, another poem and several articles about Zapotec women. An article by the Mexican author Elena Poniatowska is an especially compelling account of these women.

The third section is dedicated solely to COCEI, the political movement. It includes more poems, as well as testimonies of COCEI women, and an inaugural speech of a politician. Finally, the last section, about the cultural politics and linguistic revival of Juchitán, includes many indigenous voices heard through poetry and interviews. Two articles in the section stand out. One is on the effect of radio as a force for cultural revival in Oaxaca. It is one of the few articles on indigenous radio in Mexico available. Another article on the 'Proud midwives of Juchitán' is the final section of the book. It sums up the general tone of the volume, discussing midwives as a 'special, richly varied group of women, greatly respected in the community and preferred by most childbearing women to doctors' (p. 277). The emphasis on health and perinatal care in this book is a real reflection of the way that health issues are very much part of the politics of indigenous movements in Mexico today. But the seemingly unquestioning and praising tone of the article is more a celebration of indigenous strength than a discussion of health issues.

One feature of cultural politics as well as much of the collaboration by anthropologists and other social scientists with indigenous groups is an attitude of accepting a positive presentation of culture rather than questioning it. The cultural politics of Juchitán and its analysis in this book presents Zapotec society more within the representation of indigenous people as the ideal rather than the reality of Mexico. But as a *tour-de-force* of a mix of history, politics, art and anthropology, the volume is certainly an excellent example of this new representation of indigenous people.

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CLASSEN, CONSTANCE, DAVID HOWES & ANTHONY SYNNOTT. *Aroma: the cultural history of smell*. viii, 248 pp., bibliogr. London, New York: Routledge, 1994. £12.99 (paper)

Aroma: the cultural history of smell is an interesting collaboration by three researchers, each of