

dynamics and tensions concerning how religious visions are interpreted at the site. How do Marian seers allow others to have miraculous experiences without conceding their central role in the apparitional movement? How do pilgrims find meaning in anomalous photographs taken at apparition sites? And whose interpretation of these photographs prevails? These problems show how religious seeing is simultaneously a personal undertaking and a social one.

Bitel also draws attention to the historical forces that shape religious seeing. Marian apparitions operate within a chain of memory in which tropes and elements from previous apparitions tend to reappear in subsequent ones. However, most studies of contemporary Marian apparition sites do not trace such memories back further than the nineteenth century. As a medievalist, Bitel frames contemporary Marian piety within the *longue durée*, drawing connections between Our Lady of the Rock and apparitions of the Middle Ages and antiquity. She finds that many of the concerns about discerning visions present in her ethnography are also at stake in Saint Paul's letters and the *Didache*. Bitel is also innovative in looking at the role of popular culture in shaping ways of religious seeing. Without condescension Bitel notes how films such as *The Wizard of Oz* and *E.T.* inform the way pilgrims are able to talk about their visions. This shift in historical scope is an innovative and much needed approach to the study of Marian apparitions.

As case studies, Marian apparitions are especially capacious because they are germane to so many problems in religious studies—the interpretation of mystical experiences, the creation of sacred space, the tension between folk practices and ecclesiastical authorities, and so on. *Our Lady of the Rock* contributes to this area of study by providing excellent thick description on an understudied apparition site. Additionally, Bitel's accessible writing style and the accompanying photos make this an ideal text for an undergraduate course dealing with visual piety, mysticism, or lived religion.

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*New Media and Religious Transformations in Africa*. Edited by Rosalind I. J. Hackett and Benjamin F. Soares. Indiana University Press, 2015. 332 pages. \$85.00 cloth; \$35.00 paper; ebook available.

What is fascinating for a Westerner about the interfaces of media and religion in Africa is their breadth, color, dynamism, and unashamed enmeshment in life and death, in their various dimensions. This volume illustrates and illuminates these qualities with a collection of essays that reflects that breadth, and that unpacks and illuminates the color, dynamism, and enmeshment of the mediation of African religion.

The editors outline the scope of the interaction of African religion with new media canvassed in the book: evidence of changes *of* religion; changes *in* religion; more space for a greater range of religious actors and organizations; the rise of new religious publics; new religious spaces for religious expression, communication, practice and encounter; new religious debates; changed configurations between religious groups; and changes in state and/or popular recognition of religious groups.

These prominent sociological themes intersect in the book's structure, which is divided into three media lenses: "Old" Media; Print and Radio, New Media and Media Worlds; and Arenas of Exchange, Competition and Conflict. Through these lenses a variety of forms of mediation and their interaction are viewed: radio, print, film, satellite, ceremonies, music, miracles, worship, VCDs and DVDs, audio cassettes, mobile phones, social media, television and dreamscapes; and the interplay of a number of inherited religious traditions with the practicalities and contestations of a variety of social contexts: political regulations and negotiations, inherited, imported and native cultural practices, economic needs and aspirations, bodily engagements, and the competition of the fluid media and religious marketplaces.

The book is good in providing extensive and interesting detail to flesh out the bigger analytical picture. Rotimi Taiwo's chapter looks at Pentecostal discourses in SMS text messages in Southwestern Nigeria, for example—the translation, one could say, from speaking in tongues to speaking in fingers—and its extensive acceptance outside the formal activities of the institution to build and communicate community support, to evangelize, and to inspire. Or, in a slightly different vein but equally illuminating for its detail, Asonzeh Ukah writes about the issues raised by the decision of the National Broadcasting Commission of Nigeria to introduce legislation to prohibit the broadcasting of fake or dubious miracles by Pentecostal pastors that were seen to be deceiving or exploiting unsuspecting viewers. While there was support for the government action from the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria, what wasn't defined was how the NBC, or enacting stations, was to distinguish genuine miracles from fake ones. This led one critic to say that the NBC was entering a field it had no qualifications by which to make a judgment and by stopping miracles on television it was acting as God. Ukah concludes from the incident that the government and the PFN could be seen to be in collaboration as cartels, ready to use media regulation to control their vested access and activities within the religion market. These two examples are illustrative of what marks all fifteen insightful case studies.

In a way that is not as apparent or accepted in continents such as Europe, North America, or Australia, the character of religion in Africa, and the religious life of its people, is accepted as being closely integrated with the practicalities of their cultural, political, economic and communication environments, each of which at present are dynamic and

marked by strong competitiveness. It is to be expected that in such a dynamic situation, with rapid changes taking place in media technologies and their applications globally, changes in religion in Africa triggered by changes in their globally massaged, embodied mediation would follow. This book gives valuable insights into the dimensions of those changes, in both detail and broader reflection. It is a commendable collection.

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*Spirit Possession in French, Haitian, and Vodou Thought: An Intellectual History.* By Alessandra Benedicty-Kokken. Lexington Books, 2015. viii + 419 pages. \$110.00 cloth; ebook available.

The focus of Alessandra Benedicty-Kokken's first book is best summarized by her statement "possession . . . provides a mode of narration that enables a person to survive what seems to others to be a dismal reality" (15). The text itself falls into four distinct sections, each containing a selection of semi-independent essays. The first portion examines the concept of dispossession, whether political, economic, or otherwise, thereby laying the groundwork for an argument that possession can be a form of healing. Part two addresses spirit possession with an emphasis on how French scholars have tended to demonize it. The third section examines possession as well as zombification in the writings of René Depestre. Part four relies on the novels of Claude Fignolé and Kettly Mars to discuss the idea of repossession in the midst of the hardships of modern Haiti.

Benedicty-Kokken's scholarship has some impressive features that will appeal to those with backgrounds in literature and, to a lesser extent, other aspects of the humanities. One cannot help but acknowledge her strong grasp of philosophy and French literary theory. Michel Foucault, Jean-Paul Sartre, and others who figure prominently in contemporary thinking, make their appearances alongside scholars and writers of fiction. Moreover, the author recognizes the fact that writers frequently pick up on the ideas of their peers without citing them—or sometimes even reading their works. This is a significant point that is all-too-easy to forget.

While those unversed in literary criticism, French fiction and philosophy, and Haitian Vodou may well find this book a difficult read, its author has made provisions to help. The book's end-of-essay notes are extensive and useful, especially in cases when readers require additional knowledge to understand the texts under examination. In addition, Benedicty-Kokken includes as an appendix an extensive timeline that helps readers keep track of major events in the development of thought involving spirit possession and Vodou in general.