

making sense was often aided by the use of 'gestalt': making the dream part of the present self rather than the unconscious. The author also writes of the value of reflexivity and the use of one's own dreams during fieldwork. He describes how he kept a dream diary during fieldwork, which revealed both anxieties around his research and a greater awareness of his relationship with the community of his field site.

Although Edgar insists that no psychoanalytic expertise is necessary, he suggests that the researcher may benefit from engaging a trained 'groupworker' to assist with or lead the group facilitation. He asserts that in his extensive experience of using these methods, there has been little or no cause for concern for the well-being of participants. Although painful memories can be and sometimes are elicited during group sessions, participants often found these sessions to be cathartic. The author asserts that qualitative interviews in general are designed to elicit a depth of detail from participants and that they too may elicit discussions that are painful to participants. Nevertheless, he suggests that the researcher should remain vigilant for any signs of distress and to be aware that participants may continue to dwell on some of the issues raised after the group session has ended. For this reason, it is important to have in place a system for ensuring that further contact is made available if participants require this.

Despite the author's assurances to the contrary, I remained unconvinced in a number of areas. Firstly, Edgar previously trained and practised in social work and I am unsure whether he really takes account of the skills that his experience brought to this research technique, since his group facilitation skills would almost certainly be far in advance of most research students or possibly even more experienced researchers. This might also ensure that he was better able to detect signs of latent distress in participants and to bring sessions to a safe and effective closure. For this reason, I have reservations around whether imagework would be an appropriate method for novice researchers. Furthermore, although

he states that it might require a few days training, he gives no indication where or how this might be accessed. A final criticism would be that Edgar leaves a little imagework for the reader to do themselves: although he clearly shows the potential for eliciting a depth of implicit or embodied knowledge through this technique, he fails to connect the groupwork examples to an anthropological analysis, save by passing reference to some previously published papers. As an enthusiastic supporter of non-positivist approaches, I have no doubt that imagework offers a valuable contribution to researching the anthropology of emotion and experience, but fear that others may not be as easily convinced.

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Ferrándiz Martín, Francisco. 2004. *Escenarios del cuerpo. Espiritismo y sociedad en Venezuela*. Bilbao: Universidad de Deusto. 229 pp. Pb.: €13.50. ISBN: 84 7485 950 6.

Driving into the city of Caracas, the visitor will be surprised by a big statue of a naked woman on the expressway median. Heavily muscular and sexuated, she is sitting on a *danta* (an indigenous wild tapir) holding a pelvis bone up into the air. The statue, made in the fifties by artist Alejandro Colina, poetically recreates María Lionza, an indigenous deity of supposed prehispanic origin, the centre of contemporary Venezuela's most important cult of spiritual possession.

Escenarios del cuerpo uses several ethnographic lenses to analyse the relationships between the emergent spiritist cult of María Lionza and the more general historical, spatial and cultural processes going on in the country. At makeshift altars with images of the deities, during long *trance* sessions at night, in the midst of candles, tobacco and liquor offerings, well-trained mediums are possessed by spirits from a lively pantheon that includes national heroes such as Simón Bolívar, el Cacique Guacaipuro and the

canonised figure of the doctor José Gregorio Hernández. The pantheon is continuously changing, reflecting the vicissitudes of daily life. Presided by Queen María Lionza, the spirits are organised in *cortes* (courts) – the *libertadores*, *indios*, *chamarreros*, *médicos*, *encantos*, *africanos*, *vikingos*, *malandros* and several others – each with a distinctive style of performance and revelation. Through their mediation, the *materias* (mediums) are able to foresee the future, cure and give spiritual advice.

Ferrándiz claims that this cult as we know it today is the outcome of an ‘invention of tradition’ associated with the modernisation of the country, heavily dependent on an early development of the oil industry. A variety of social agents seem to have taken part in the complex processes of invention of the María Lionza cult – of her mythification, divulgation, dissemination, prosecution, nationalisation, appropriation, contestation and transformation into a spectacle. Among these agents are the political and cultural elites, the media, the State, the Church, the medical profession, but mainly and above all the popular devotees of the cult, present all around the country. Significantly, they proliferate particularly in the poorest settlements of Caracas (*cerritos*). According to Ferrándiz, these are indeed the very subjects and bearers of the cult in its current form.

When analysing the social construction of the cult, the author emphasises its stubborn resistance to normalisation, its proliferating hybridity in both form and content, as well as the tendency of the many small spiritist societies that form the social basis of the cult to disperse in a myriad of scattered, autonomous centres. The book also focuses on the body as the key locus for both political resistance and everyday transcendence – a body treated, in Ferrándiz’s words, as a ‘project of reform’ in a ‘wounded space’.

This monograph convincingly shows how a religious cult can be taken as a strategic vantage point from which to consider national society and its crises. *Escenarios del cuerpo* accomplishes this goal in a thorough manner.

The book’s 230 pages combine brave and sensitive ethnography, enjoyable writing and well-informed analysis. The references switch with mastery from the biopolitical concerns of a Foucauldian anthropology of the body (Scheper-Hughes, Lock, Csordas) to Venezuelan cultural sources (Barreto, Amodio, Salas); from the classics of visual ethnography (Rouch, MacDougall) to updated work on Latin urban youth cultures of survival (*culturas de urgencia*); from incursions in biomedical theory to careful footnotes on reflexive fieldwork.

Venezuelan anthropologists have already recognised the important contribution of this work, in particular the discovery of a whole gamut of new spirits now emerging and entering the cult: *malandros*, *africanos* and *vikingos*. These spirits are associated with a new imagination of the body in which social suffering takes embodied forms, such as the exhibition of bloody wounds that the mediums inflict on themselves during the possession séance. The wave of violence that has razed Caracas neighbourhoods since the late eighties thus finds an afflictive, redressive expression.

Wisely, the book ends with the words of Daniel, key informant and medium of the cult. Asked about future trends, he foresees a spark of hope. For him, the *encantos*, a court of innocent children spirits from the forest, will displace the present moment of violently murdered *malandros* with their characteristic deployment of wounds and suffering. This is a sign of hope to be shared by the reader, a final gift from this beautiful book.

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Howard, Rosalyn. 2002. *Black Seminoles in the Bahamas*. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida. xviii + 150 pp. Hb.: \$55.00. ISBN: 0 8130 2559 1.

Howard is a Florida-based African (Native) American who has written an engaging and lucid ‘ethnohistory’ (p. xiii) and perhaps