

Ochoa settles on the Cuban-Kongo term "Kalunga" for a Palo conception of the dead as a "fluid immanence" like the sea—surrounding us, infusing our bodies, and producing visceral sensations in those sensitive to the dead's currents (p. 36). The effect of his in-depth description of Kalunga as the "ambient dead" in chapter 2 is to profoundly destabilize the reader's efforts to reify this category or assimilate it to a more familiar conception, also present among Cuban folk religious practitioners, of what Ochoa calls "the responsive dead" as distinct spirits, even identifiable individuals. In some ways, his evocative but tangled descriptions of Kalunga are themselves iconic of the kind of fluid, felt but not fully articulated presences that he ascribes to Kalunga. Seldom have I read an account that so powerfully conjures a completely different ontology. I was at times reminded of Nigerian writer Ben Okri's novel *Famished Road* (1993), which evokes a similarly phantasmagoric sea of spirit presences saturating the surface of everything and penetrating the very notion of matter. As the ethnography unfolds, the significance of Kalunga deepens.

This is a rare ethnography that is writerly enough to be a compelling read. I scarcely wanted to put the book down; even researchers and students not well versed in matters of Cuban folk religion will find it engrossing. The two central figures of Ochoa's fieldwork—his mentors in Palo, Isidra and Teodoro—are among the most fully realized personalities I have encountered in an ethnographic account, a credit to Ochoa's eye for people's quirks and the dramas of interpersonal relationships. Not only the living humans but their ritual power objects, the *prendas-ngangas-nkisis*, themselves appear as personalities, inseparable from the spiritual agents—*nfumbes*, *mpungus*, and *ndokis*—that animate them.

Much of Palo practice centers on the creation and care of *prendas-ngangas-nkisis*, those ferocious-looking cauldrons brimming with dirt and blood and bristling with sticks and skulls and iron. Throughout the book, Ochoa considers the "immanent materiality" (p. 11) of *prendas* as objects with a dangerous agency that demand considerable discipline of their human possessors. The second and third sections of the book, "Palo Society" and "Prendas-Ngangas-Nkisis," are knit together by a drama that unfolds in the Quita Manaquita praise house. In each chapter Ochoa narrates the progress of a series of rituals, from preparations to outcomes, considering different aspects of Palo ritual objects and actions. That he himself moved between roles of observer, apprentice, godchild, and principal in many of these activities lends further vividness to his account.

Ochoa describes Palo as creating irresolvable conflicts (p. 17): in becoming a *palero* (initiated Palo priest), one gains access to the world-changing power of Kalunga materialized in *prendas* and through the *palero's* body. But such potentialities can be a source of torment as much as information, and the materialized power residing in a *prenda-nganga-nkisi* is unrelentingly demanding. *Paleros* must embrace living with a risk akin to keeping a small nuclear power plant in one's

closet: tremendous power can be unleashed at one's bidding or, without extreme care, against oneself. As with nuclear power plants, cooling and containing the spiritual energies of *prendas* is essential. But for the *prenda* to do work on its owner's behalf, it must be activated, incited to work—most importantly by offerings of blood from sacrificed animals and new initiates. One senses a drama in every practitioner-*prenda* relationship. Indeed, Ochoa describes how "raising one's relationship with a *prenda* to the level of a struggle is the greatest compliment a *prenda* can receive" because it advertises the power available for its owner to unleash (p. 190).

Not just struggle but play, too, emerges as a central metaphor for Palo practice. There are agonistic competitions of will between *prenda-nganga-nkisis* and their human owners, between senior *paleros* (*tatas*) and their restive godchildren, and among *paleros* from different praise houses. Such competitions of will involve a mastery of secrets that must be cunningly wrested from one's ritual elders, sensitivities to the dead that permit flashes of insight, and well-honed abilities to deploy ritual speech, songs, riddles, and challenges to best one's opponents. Ultimately, the ritual play of challenging one's rivals in ceremonies and negotiating the fraught relationship with one's *prenda-nganga-nkisis* and the dead they materialize has a very serious purpose: protecting practitioners and those who seek their help from harm and righting wrongs they have suffered, sometimes by causing harm to enemies and, in the process, changing destinies.

Ochoa saves some of the most arresting aspects of Palo for his final section, in which he describes how practitioners use Palo to help themselves, their godchildren, and their clients. He gives what is surely the most careful and comprehensive account of the *prenda judta*, or "Jewish *prenda*," distinguished by its ability to kill and by its association with the "specter" of Jews in Spanish Catholicism. Here, as throughout this excellent ethnography, Ochoa takes the reader inside Palo, providing the best account available to date of its felt reality and its actual practices, songs, and sayings, as well as the textures of gender, ritual family, race, and class; the struggles of everyday Cuban life (and death); and all the emotional and interpersonal dramas that play out in and through Palo.

Reference Cited

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Close Your Eyes and Then Listen to Their Words

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The Magic Children: Racial Identity at the End of the Age of

Race. By Roger Echo-Hawk. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast, 2010.

The first time I told someone to close their eyes and listen to the words was about 20 years ago. My audience was my three-year-old daughter, who had just uttered words that horrified me. They were not curse words but words of hatred toward someone based solely on their color. My goal was to try to raise at least one person in this next generation to see beyond the differences. We are the human race.

In *The Magic Children*, Echo-Hawk takes the reader through a tormented personal struggle with the concepts of race and racialism. He draws attention to the issue that many children see "Indian" as race, "white" as race, and "black" as race when in fact they are colors. He weaves his self-identification and his continual search for refinement of that identification through the pages as he explains his dreams, and he describes the activism efforts he participated in as a hippy, Indian, Pawnee, and possibly even as a Hispanic. The stories and events come from his cultural heritage, the time in which he lives, and his academic heritage as a historian. In his article "Deconstructing Roger Echo-Hawk (sort of)," Larry Zimmerman (2010) provides readers with insights into Echo-Hawk's "split personality." Readers of *The Magic Children* would do well to read Zimmerman if they want a fuller understanding of the book and its underlying meanings.

As I read this book, I struggled with the content. Echo-Hawk conflates race with culture, and I have a personal abhorrence to the concept of race. My mind screamed, "Race is a human construct, not a biological one!" I had an argument with a stranger about this in 1976. He said that whites and blacks were different races because they could not create a child together. After collecting my jaw from the tabletop, I tried to intellectually interject that he must be mistaken because I know people in so-called mixed marriages who have birthed children . . . didn't matter, I had to be wrong, simply can't happen. I wonder whether our discussions had an effect on his racist thinking. The scary thing is that, even in light of "scientific facts," people still hold onto their beliefs.

Roger and I are of the same generation. We share "hippiedom." Our teens were spent in the '60s and '70s in places like Boulder, Colorado. We grew up during a time when questioning who we were, where we came from, and who we wanted to be was encouraged within schools and society. We are also members of the Closet Chickens. I practice indigenous or community-based archaeology and have spent the last 20-plus years developing educational materials that present both the traditional cultural and the archaeological Western science stories of the past in the hopes of providing a more complete understanding of peoples and our history.

The revelations within *The Magic Children* are presented through the recounting of dreams, stories, and historical accounts. These are individual but are not limited to Echo-Hawk; similar struggles are felt by many. The historical accounts presented are personal and academic. Personal

accounts of events that until now have been transmitted orally are now committed to print. They are now "the" history that readers will come to understand as how it was, but readers should remember that, like all histories, the view is from the documenter and should not be considered the entire history.

The book contains nine sections that spiral through the themes of self-identity, race, and the implications of race. On page 14, Echo-Hawk notes that "race is a lie" and that the idea of race "has more to do with the human impulse to sort people into conventional social groupings, not an accurate biological definition of humankind." He goes on to state that "in our world, constructs of race powerfully support both personal identity and social meaning, and the racial structures of American culture seem unambiguous, unshakeable."

Echo-Hawk is by no means the only one struggling with race and its implications. The American Anthropological Association's "About RACE: A Public Education Project" home page (<http://www.aaanet.org/resources/A-Public-Education-Program.cfm>) states that "race shapes how one sees and is seen by others." The program explains how human variation is different from race and endeavors to get across three messages: "race is a recent human invention," "race is about culture, not biology," and "race and racism are embedded in institutions and everyday life."

On page 31, Echo-Hawk comments that "it's definitely not normal to deliberately abandon racial identity as I have done." Really? Why not? I ask, Is race something you define for yourself, or is it something that others define for you? Perhaps this might be a question posed in a seminar discussing this book.

Echo-Hawk has inserted the word "race" into contexts with what I hope is an effort to provoke thinking. This is especially true in his discussion of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), where he states that "under NAGPRA, Indian Tribes—as racially identified sovereignties—are empowered to repatriate human remains" (p. 53). I've taught sections on sovereignty in Introduction to Native American Studies courses, and I've seen tribal rights defined on the basis of their sovereign rights, but I have never even considered this to be a racially identified issue or right.

A great deal of the middle section of the book focuses on a group known as the Closet Chickens. The Closet Chickens are Native Americans who are archaeologists, although over time the group has also brought into its feathered fold individuals who are not "racially" Indian but who practice indigenous archaeology. The name Closet Chickens was coined because when the group started there were so few Native Americans who were archaeologists that they could fit into a small closet (Chicken Noodle's). Initiation into the group includes naming. Mine is Chicken Soup (Jewish heritage continues on even in the close quarters of what Echo-Hawk refers to as the Coop). In the section titled "The Enchanted Coop," Echo-Hawk discusses the struggles with identity and race in relation to the founding of the Chickens and the struggles of group identity.

"Reflections on Racism" (pp. 76–87) is based on stories originally written in 1996–1997 titled "Reflections on Reparation." The reflection takes a contemporary look back at concepts of race, and in the last sections Echo-Hawk analyzes James Riding In, Ward Churchill, and Suzan Shown Harjo and their involvement in American racialism, concluding that "the academy has a responsibility to rethink race studies" (p. 166). And herein lies the crux of the issue and the applicability of the book.

It's no longer 1976, but the assertion that race is a biological distinction remains. Racism is still handed down generation to generation. It has not faded away, been erased from texts, or been educated out of existence. Until people can close their eyes and listen to the words, discussions on race, racialism, and racism need to be part of an ongoing conversation. Words such as "ethnicity" and "culture" need to be substituted for "race" in conversation and in print. It will take generations, and, although it will probably push a lot of buttons, *The Magic Children* can be used to stimulate discussion and engage critical thinking in anthropology and ethnic studies classrooms and thereby contribute to bringing about this change for students, both personally and academically.

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If We Would But Stoop and Humble Ourselves

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Gandhi's Children. Video. Produced, directed, and edited by David MacDougall. 185 minutes. Canberra, Australia: Ronin Films, 2008.

The greatest lessons in life, if we would but stoop and humble ourselves, we would learn from the so-called ignorant children. (Mahatma Gandhi)

David MacDougall's *Gandhi's Children* is a sensitive and un-sentimental depiction of life inside a boys' shelter, the Prayas Children's Home, just outside of New Delhi, India. The video focuses on the complex emotional, rational, and corporeal responses of several boys to the shelter and the various psychological and physical traumas that bring them there in the first place. In its attention to disenfranchised, delinquent, and homeless boys, *Gandhi's Children* is the video alter ego of MacDougall's works *The Doon School* and *Schoolscapes*, which

portray more distinguished institutions of learning and living. These works are united in their examination of the ways social aesthetics—the distinctive aesthetic landscape of a community consisting of sets of behaviors and sensory experiences as well as the physical environment—shape corporeality, moral attitudes, and identity among children in institutional settings.

The video opens with a series of beautiful images of the neighborhood, the interior of the boys' shelter, and its inhabitants peacefully slumbering in bed at dawn. The idyllic sequence of boys dreamily stretched out together on cots is followed by an unflinching look at the communal latrines, where boys relieve themselves with little apparent camera shyness. These first several minutes allow us to explore the image without having to attend to subtitles and to take stock of the sights and sounds of the shelter. The primarily nonverbal quality of these scenes is ruptured with a cut to one boy slapping a smaller boy for making a mess of the toilet, the first subtitled exchange of the video. The scenes of boys draped over beds, a child squatting over a latrine, and the smack of a hand on a tear-stained face introduce us to what emerges as an integral and increasingly developed theme of *Gandhi's Children*: the corporeality of shelter life at Prayas Children's Home and the ways in which it is regulated by routines, disciplinary action, and social pressures, which in turn create and enforce hierarchies within the institution, both among the boys and between the boys and their custodians.

Although the narrative of the documentary becomes increasingly driven by verbal content, much of what we come to know about the boys is communicated bodily. There are several scenes in which bony-bodied boys appear engulfed in wooden chairs or couches while being interrogated by staff about their origins. In these portraits, the boys are alternately vulnerable and calculating, with each response to questions posed by staff unique in the rationales and emotions they reveal. The matter-of-factness with which they relate personal tragedies is given other layers of meaning as they squirm, fidget, and fiddle. They stall, perform, and frequently impress with their perspicacity, courage, and endurance.

We witness the daily routine of making beds, queuing for food, performing group exercises, and enduring time spent in the unruly classroom. We watch as the boys are dressed, groomed, measured, weighed, and even poked and prodded by the staff doctor. Some of the children seem ambivalent about these invasions and the instructions they are given on hygiene, which are luxuries of self-care not afforded by life on the streets. We witness one boy's attitude toward all of this change markedly, signaling a kind of social rebirth. In one scene, he silently and almost sullenly rubs a medicated cream for scabies on his belly; in another, he bathes at the insistence of an older boy, although screaming in protest. In little time, however, he is enjoying the experience, scrubbing with apparent pleasure. He then eagerly puts on a clean shirt and sits for a haircut, completing an informal initiation of belonging into the shelter, in which the corporeal and social merge.