Strange, Stuart Earle: Suspect Others: Spirit Mediums, Self-Knowledge, and Race in Multiethnic Suriname. Series: Anthropological Horizons.
281 pp. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2021. ISBN 978-1-4875-4026-5

Suspect Others draws a differentiated picture of relational selves in contemporary Suriname. Centering his analysis on epistemic affects, such as doubt, suspicion and mistrust, Stuart Earle Strange contributes to anthropological debates about self-assertion and belonging in ethnically and religiously diverse societies.

Surinamese Hindu and Ndyuka Maroon selves are always embedded in social relations. At the same time, it is difficult or even impossible for Strange's interlocutors to really know these selves. Finding out about the self or multiple selves is beyond their human consciousness and requires divine or spirit mediumship to learn about others and how these others affect the self. The Surinamese case exemplifies the importance of suspicion and 'racecraft' as key aspects of Indo-Caribbean and Maroon lives and their quests for self-knowledge, which are worth considering in other postcolonial societies. The author adopts Barbara and Karen Fields' (2012) concept of racecraft, which emphasizes race as socially constructed. Including both Hindu and Ndyuka rituals in the ethnography is a welcome approach to show the parallels, overlaps, interactions and frictions in terms of ritual practices, conceptual notions of the self/selves and ethnicity or racecraft.

Strange provides the reader with a rich ethnography of ritual possession as a means to gain knowledge about the self, knowledge which is otherwise beyond the awareness of human beings. In these rituals, patients realize the presence of spirits in themselves, and they learn how to reflect critically about what they thought they knew about themselves. Suspicion against others is critical to the processes of how people learn about these otherwise hidden selves.

In Chapter 1, the importance of suspicion is contextualized with regard to contested land, fragile property and prosperity, and uncertain belonging in post-plantation Suriname. Chapters 2 and 3 introduce the reader to Surinamese Hindu and Ndyuka ritual quests to find out about their selves. The book's cover shows two examples of what the altars around which the mediums center their ritual activities can look like. The Hindu shrine on the left features offerings, such as fruits and flowers, assembled around deities. The image detail of the Ndyuka spirit altar on the right conveys secrecy through its mysterious installation of ritual objects, which some mediums refrain from explaining to further enhance their obscurity (p. 114–115). Despite different notions of selves – Ndyuka selves consist of multiple souls or spirits, while Hindus have single selves – both Hindu and Ndyuka mediums urge clients to reflect upon and question their selves.

Chapter 4 takes up pain as an important individual sensation that embodies social relations. Mediums reveal pain as an expression of particular divinities, spirits, mistrustful or violent kin or neighbor relations. As an example, the author describes how a Ndyuka medium relates a specific painful sensation back to an ancestral spirit, who had suffered from the same pain and now resides in the afflicted person.

Dreams, the focus of Chapter 5, are also far from merely personal, but have collective relevance for the dreamer's social relations. Frequently discussed and interpreted among Surinamese Hindus and Maroons, dreams are important sites where knowledge and relations between the self and others are revealed.

Mediumship renders identities complex and diverse, as they are embedded in nuanced webs of ancestral ties. By contrast, ideas about race and processes of racializing others reduce personhood to exclusive ancestral identities. In Chapter 6, Strange skillfully shows how mediumship and racecraft can work in competing ways. Mediumship emphasizes the opacity of selves; racecraft assumes truths based on physical traits that mediums deem misleading. This mutual suspicion of the ethno-racial other between Surinamese Hindus and Maroons can prevent personal and economic relationships, as well as successful mediation.

Throughout the chapters, the author provides the reader with thick descriptions of ritual experiences, complemented by his interlocutors' conversations about pain and dreams and their ways of questioning their social relationships and the mediums themselves. These rich and vivid insights form the basis of a thorough analysis of the interlocutors' lifeworlds. The author adeptly interweaves these into a well-managed book. I would have loved to read even more about their life stories, their professional and daily lives outside the ritual context, to picture in greater detail how social class background and aspirations for social status, as they intersect with ethno-racial communal belonging, play out in the individual life stories.

It is exciting to read about the ethnographer's interactions with his interlocutors and with the deities. I appreciated the well-placed glimpses into the ethnographer's involvement in the ritual actions. 'Dressed in my *pujari*'s uniform, I stood to Bhairo's left, recording and assisting him in whatever way he requested' (p. 78). In such instances, I would be interested in knowing more about how the anthropologist reached his position of 'recording and assisting' a deity who is possessing one of his interlocutors, for example whether there was a process of initiation. Reflection on how the ethnographer's positionality and authority developed in the course of the fieldwork would also be interesting when interlocutors ask him for his opinion about how much an interlocutor should pay a particular medium (p. 192).

The book is well structured. The chapter titles are telling, and they guide the reader through how the themes develop and ultimately interact. Frequent subheadings contribute to the book's readability. As a minor remark to further enhance reader-friendliness, I would have preferred to read some of the information provided in the endnotes in the main text instead. For instance, percentages of the ethnic composition of the Surinamese society (p. 7, n. 5) are helpful to getting a sense of the ratio of the minorities and of the lack of a clear majority, which is critical for grasping the social complexities described in the book.

Suspect Others offers valuable insights for scholars and postgraduate students interested in postcolonial societies and in the anthropology of religion. Focusing on suspicion and self-understanding, Strange develops a productive lens through which

to think about contemporary Suriname. The importance of jealousy and suspicion of neighbors or relatives, whom mediums reveal as, for instance, performing sorcery against the afflicted person, and the ways in which ethnic suspicion is played out in these processes, seems particularly pronounced in the Surinamese case. At the same time, these observations resonate with ethnographies about African and South Asian traditions in other post-plantation societies. Strange's work on epistemic affects, such as suspicion, provides helpful tools for scholars to examine the making of relational selves, social relations and societies.

Natalie Lang,
Centre for Modern Indian Studies, University of Göttingen

Reference

Fields, Barbara, and Karen Fields 2012: *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life*. New York: Verso.