Parallelism is not only a way of mnemonic codification but also a technique for orienting the evocation and imagination through the construction of salient figures—chimeras, presented as creatures from the invisible part of the world. The third function of parallelism is to define the locutor of the ritualized text as a chimera. A parallel world is constructed through ritual speech and the transformation of the shaman into a complex and paradoxical image, one who is composed of contradictory identities (one here, other or others in the parallel world). Severi defines the locutor as an “I–memory.” The locutor of a ritual recitation has to be differentiated from the one of a narration, as these two forms of transmission of memory also have to be distinguished. Because he is capable of assuming plural, contradicting, but temporary identities—creating in this way a tension with the everyday perception—the shaman evokes at the same time doubt and acceptance. Something impossible not to believe is created, similar to what Severi finds in Carlo Ginzburg’s (1983[1966]) analysis of European witchcraft. As Severi states, doubt is the essence of any belief. He ascribes the effectiveness of the shamanistic therapy to the process of the patient’s projection in reaction to the incomprehendable parts of the uttered traditional song—it lies in the interplay between the shaman’s only vaguely comprehended sounds and the patient’s own experiences of pain. Due to condensing of different contradictory aspects, the ritual communication is never totally comprehensive, but it consequently engenders imagination, believing, and mnemonic evocation.

Severi concludes with a reflection on uncertainty in the context of cultural conflict. Memories of it gave rise to the Apache Christ and the Christian Lady Sebastiana (death) as new ritual chimeras presenting cultural hybrids and paradoxes. At the same time, they embody and confront the enemy, present continuity, break with tradition, and engender new forms of beliefs.

Due to his groundbreaking reflections on the old anthropological concepts, The Chimera Principle has all the values of the monumental anthropological synthetic works worth reading and “thinking with.”

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Advertising Diversity: Ad Agencies and the Creation of Asian American Consumers by Shalini Shankar.


DOI: 10.1111/aman.12747

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In a time of mass minority incarceration, racial profiling, and public xenophobia, we are reminded that discussions about the various means by which diversity, race, and ethnicity are constructed are already, and increasingly, important. While Shalini Shankar’s new book Advertising Diversity does not engage with racism’s most violent forms, so prevalent today, it makes an equally important contribution by improving our understanding of the subtle techniques through which difference is depoliticized and reproduced through racial and ethnic representation.

Drawing on four years of engagement with eight advertising agencies and more than 200 industry professionals, Shankar illustrates how claims of inclusion and colorblindness contrast with the proliferation of agencies that specialize in emphasizing difference and marketing to minority populations. Echoing Jane Hill’s (2008) *Everyday Language of White Racism* and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva’s (2009) *Racism without Racists*, Shankar illustrates how, without intent or malice, the focus on diversity acts as “shorthand for inclusion” while simultaneously diverting attention away from the inequalities or prejudices that underpin so many of our differences (p. 19).

In an industry in which whiteness has long been the norm, multicultural advertising is actively emphasizing the significance of race in the name of profitability. Shankar is particularly interested in how advertisers engage in biopolitics, drawing on increasingly fine-grained census data to naturalize racial differences and transform Asian Americans from “model minorities to model consumers” (p. 23). As an economic anthropologist critical of the inequalities the capitalist system perpetuates, I appreciated Shankar’s attention to the circuits of capital that give ethnorracial difference market value. In this assemblage of discursive and material forms, multicultural advertising agencies recognize that their ability to represent diversity and perform as ethnic and linguistic experts is essentially about opening new markets. This “intercultural affect,” Shankar argues, illustrates how race is negotiated in consumer capitalism.
At the same time, Shankar avoids a blanket critique of Asian advertising firms. Detailing the hard work and creativity of many of the men and women with whom she worked, Shankar’s writing communicates a clear respect for those she interviewed and observed. Shankar also leaves open the possibility that the growth of the Asian advertising firms she observed might contribute to the politics of antiracism by redefining normalcy in the United States. Tracing industry representations of Asians from the inscrutable Chinese laundrymen at the turn of the 20th century to portraits of the highly desirable “recession-proof” Asian American consumer of today, Shankar suggests that these representations have the potential to erode the perception of Asian Americans as “forever foreigners” and inspire social activism in the future. She writes that “the hope, then, is that these diverse new visions of normal will someday become simply ‘normal’” (p. 268).

While the need to balance critique with respect for the livelihoods of the people with whom one works is familiar to anthropologists, some readers might find themselves wishing for clearer sense of Shankar’s perspectives on the industry. She clearly endeavors to illustrate the progressive potential for antiracism in these firms and the ads they produce in several instances. In others, she emphasizes how this work naturalizes differences. She writes, drawing on George Lipsitz (2011), “as long as racialized spaces are maintained—in this case, diversity being treated as a special interest—single actors do not need to decide to discriminate in order for racism to persist . . . in such spaces . . . liberal-minded individuals may ‘inadvertently participate’ in reproducing racism” (p. 20).

Shankar’s ambiguity, however, can also be read as a careful attempt to recognize uncertainty. As Shankar clearly recognizes, utilizing Félix Deleuze and Gilles Guattari’s (1987) concept of an assemblage to frame much of her discussion, there is nothing static about ethnoracial representations or the identities of the advertising professionals that produce them. What is clear is that there is a high degree of uncertainty about how racism and whiteness will take new forms in the 21st century and how Asian American marketing firms will influence and be influenced by these shifting conditions.

I would like to hope, along with Shankar, that ethnoracially targeted advertising can shift our public conceptualizations of race and ethnicity, creating a new, more inclusive sense of normal. But even if they do, these ads are clearly not well suited to address the conditions that underwrite so much of contemporary difference, including opportunity and justice. It is also unclear how the practice of advertising diversity, already in the service of the market, could lead to meaningful change (p. 253). It is nonetheless important to understand the practices at work, particularly given how powerful discursive and material forms can be, even in the service of the market, as we form new assemblages of diversity.

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Women and Power in Zimbabwe: Promises of Feminism by Carolyn Martin Shaw.


DOI: 10.1111/aman.12748

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Carolyn Martin Shaw’s Women and Power in Zimbabwe: Promises of Feminism discusses the evolution of feminism in Zimbabwe. The book challenges long-held views, such as association of the Homecraft movement in Southern Rhodesia with the domestication of women, and argues that the movement, in fact, provided women with space to discuss issues that affected them. It also critiques the claim that there was gender equality during the liberation struggle by presenting women’s experiences, which are absent from the hegemonic and official narrative in Zimbabwe. Women’s confidence in the possibility of simultaneously liberating themselves from racial and gender oppression is deflated by persistence of gender inequality after independence. This disappointment becomes the bedrock of feminism in Zimbabwe.

The book argues that the choice between self and security, as reflected in Tsitsi Dangarembga’s Nervous Conditions (1988), is fraught with tension and predicament.