



Weaving the Threads of Life: The Khita Gyn-Ecological Healing Cult among the Yaka

René Devisch

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For the Yaka of Southwestern Zaire, infertility is a tear in the fabric of life, and the *Khita* fertility ritual is a trusted way of reweaving the damaged strands. In *Weaving the Threads of Life* René Devisch offers an extended analysis of the *Khita* cult, which leads to an original account of the workings of ritual healing.

Drawing on many years among urban and rural Yaka, Devisch analyzes their understanding of existence as a fabric of firmly but delicately interwoven threads of nature, body, and society. The fertility healing ritual calls forth forces, feelings, and meanings that allow women to rejoin themselves to the complex pattern of social and cosmic life. These elaborate rites—whether simulating mortal agony and rebirth, gestation and delivery, or flowering and decay; using music and dance, steambath or massage, dream messages or scarification—are not based on symbols of traditional beliefs. Rather, Devisch shows, the rites themselves generate forces and meaning, creating and shaping the cosmic, physical, and social world of their participants.

In contrast to current theoretical methods such as postmodern or symbolical interpretation, Devisch's praxiological approach is unique in also using phenomenological insights into the intent and results of anthropological fieldwork. This innovative work will have ramifications beyond African studies, reaching into the anthropology of medicine and the body, comparative religious history, and women's studies.

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