One weakness of the book is that it restricts the power of language to its textual aspects. The role of the body in generating feelings of loss, anxiety, and vulnerability does surface in a chapter about nightly kava-drinking sessions, where the sedating influence of kava (a local brew) on people's bodies makes the lost power that they talk about during drinking literally felt in the body. But the bodily and sensorial aspects of speech itself—as embodied language—are largely neglected. These aspects do feature prominently in the life story of a catechist presented in the last chapter. His remarks about being "pierced," "touched," and moved to tears by a sermon, and the turning point this brought about in his religious life, leave the reader wondering about the affective dimensions of the sermons and other speech acts analyzed earlier in the book. What is it about voice, volume, pitch, and performance more generally that makes a sermon touch or a prayer powerful? More broadly, what is the persuasive power and emotional impact of non-linguistic aspects of speech? The book evokes but hardly addresses questions about the limits of language in relation to religion, and hence about the limits of a language- and discourse-centered approach to religion.

These reservations aside, *In God's Image* is a major contribution to the anthropology of religion. It is a highly enjoyable, stimulating, and informative read for scholars and students of global Christianity and anyone interested in the ways in which it takes shape and meaning in local histories and cultural settings.

———Marleen de Witte, VU University Amsterdam

Pier M. Larson, *Ocean of Letters: Language and Creolization in an Indian Ocean Diaspora*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

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In this impressive work, Pier Larson sets out to challenge how historians have thought about language and culture change in the southwestern Indian Ocean and, by implication, elsewhere in the European colonial world during the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. Larson does so by focusing on the largely unknown diaspora of Malagasy-speaking peoples, most of who left the Grande Ile between the 1670s and early 1830s as slaves, in a part of the world ignored by most historians of slavery and colonialism. The significance of this diaspora is suggested by conservative estimates that the 464,000 men, women, and children exported from Madagascar between 1600 and 1900 accounted for 29 percent of all slave exports from sub-Saharan Africa to Arabia, the Persian Gulf, India, South Africa, and the Mascarene Islands of Mauritius and Réunion.

Larson's assessment of the socio-cultural and political consequences of this diaspora rests on a detailed reconstruction of how free and enslaved Malagasy,

together with small numbers of European missionaries and colonists, promoted use of the Malagasy language. In so doing, he raises substantial questions about the dominant paradigm in creolization studies, noting that previous work which views *créolité* as essentially a unilinear process of linguistic and cultural mixing does not allow for the fact that multiple languages and cultural traditions could and did co-exist and interact over extended periods in European slave colonies. Developments in the southwestern Indian Ocean and especially in the Mascarenes, he argues persuasively, demonstrate that conceptualizing creolization as a process of learned versatility, by which individuals negotiated the everyday challenges posed by linguistic and cultural diversity, can provide us with a deeper understanding of the nature and dynamics of life in European colonies both before and after slave emancipation.

Larson's argument is based on meticulous research in archival collections in Madagascar, Mauritius, France, the United Kingdom, and New Zealand, and he also draws on relevant scholarship on colonial slave societies in the Americas. His proficiency in Malagasy gives this study additional depth. His examination of letters written by literate Malagasy exiles in Mauritius, for example, deepens our understanding of how and why the modern sense of Malagasy national identity developed and underscores the important role such exiles could play in the development of proto-nationalism elsewhere in the colonial world. An equally careful reading of European sources, especially the correspondence of French and British missionaries, sheds significant new light on various aspects of Mascarene history in general and early-nineteenth-century Mauritian history in particular. Larson's willingness to incorporate the limited information available on Malagasy populations in the Cape Colony and the Comoros into his discussion speaks to a refreshing willingness to take a broader regional and comparative approach to the topics and issues under consideration. The net result is a study of decided interest and value not only to Malagasy and Mascarene specialists, but also to historians, anthropologists, and other scholars striving to better understand colonial slave systems and the Creole societies they engendered.

———Richard B. Allen, Worcester, Massachusetts

Eli Lederhendler, *Jewish Immigrants and American Capitalism, 1880–1920: From Caste to Class*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

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This book challenges the idea that culture, agency, and identity are primary factors in explaining immigrant experiences in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century America. Focusing on Jewish immigrants from Russia and Eastern Europe, the author argues instead that the existing economic