

me that I might have felt guilty for using my visit to the villages for my own needs" (56): there is no doubt that this is "confessional" or "vulnerable" writing as Herzog suggests, but is it an ethnography? There is much thick description of the interactions between Herzog and her immediate (English-speaking) colleagues, and continuous reflexive commentary on her own behaviour and words. However, there seemed no attempt to move beyond the activities structured or focused around her role as consultant. For me, this resulted in a somewhat one-sided and introspective account – akin to autobiographical research – and lacking the multiple perspectives that emerge through ethnography. This relates also to the opening intention of the research text: how far is this about building and contributing to theoretical understanding, or rather, is it to provide evidence to support the starting hypothesis?

Even if she was unable to stay longer in Nepal, Herzog could have gone much further in exploring the complexities of the intersecting tensions around identity, politics, and racism that she describes, through an in-depth comparative account of her parallel experiences in Israel. Though she touches on this connection – for instance in the comparison of the paraprofessionals in both contexts (53) or taking photographs of Ethiopian immigrants in an Israeli absorption centre (60) – she holds back from developing an extended comparative analysis based on her experiences and research insights outside Nepal. This would have helped to compensate for the inevitable constraints of being a short-term consultant writing at a distance of over ten years. This is an unusual account of a development encounter – "a game, in which Anita [Nepali counterpart] and I played the role of benevolent and professional persons in possession of desired resources" (167). It would have been even more interesting to explore how such development discourses and literacy programmes have changed and are changing in Nepal in response to some of the political and economic forces that Herzog noted back in 1997.

Anna Robinson-Pant

**Hoffman, Danny:** *The War Machines. Young Men and Violence in Sierra Leone and Liberia*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011. 295 pp. ISBN 978-0-8223-5077-4. Price: £ 16.99

In "The War Machines," Danny Hoffman explores the devastating wars that unfolded in Sierra Leone and Liberia at the end of the last century through the experiences of the young men who became members of civil militias. Though these militias were initially organized to defend rural communities, they were eventually captured by the state. The government barracked fighters in the center of Sierra Leone's capital city of Freetown, where they waited for deployment. Through an analysis of the civil militia known as the *kamajors*, Hoffman argues that young men, rather than being rooted in a fixed history, were "up for grabs," and instead had their identities molded by global forces into violent laborers, or laborers of violence: what theorists Deleuze and Guattari describe as *war machines*. These collective laboring organizations draw on existing

social relations – rather than institutions – to create new forms of being and doing. Hoffman states explicitly that he is not explaining violence in local cultural terms, nor is he interested in a common academic project of seeing violence as a way of fixing identity, of drawing lines between self and other, in uncertain times. Rather, he situates Africa and African bodies within their global context, and analyzes the ways in which war machines themselves mold the identities of young people. It is a rich, beautiful, and provocative ethnography that challenges existing ethnographic theories of the violence of youth originating in mythic and historic forms.

Hoffman argues that the barracks – with its particular spatial, economic, and military forms of humans and their labor – is the organizing principal of West African postmodernity. Through the barracks we can interrogate and understand the creation of the war machine, where war and work are coterminous, "even identical" activities for young men (xi). As the war machine involves intimate fashioning of the work and lives of youth, it is forward facing, global, and rich with possibilities, both fantastic and terrifying. Within the metaphor – and literal existence – of the barracks, Hoffman argues that we can see African postmodernity as focusing on the rapid assembling of male bodies "for efficient deployment in the overlapping service of security and profit" (xii).

Deleuze and Guattari's principal of *plateaus* – the production of new forms of being rather than the reproduction of existing social relationships – is the organizing principal of the book's chapters, which fall in two parts. The first concentrates on the social histories of the *kamajors*, in which they ascend through three plateaus of social organization, and the second focuses on the building of the barracks; the result of the *kamajors*' final plateau, that of incorporation into the logic and structure of the state. In Part I, "Histories", Hoffman illustrates how the *kamajors* were a "novel force built from the material of existing social relations but put towards new ends and generating its own institutional logic as it evolved" (85), rather than being grounded in an existing social institution based in history and lore. As such, Kamajor identity exists in performance rather than institutional roots (56). In Part II, "Building the Barracks," Hoffman illuminates how the barracks became the *nomos*, or organizing principal, by which the *kamajors* were captured and deployed by the state (103). Cooption by the state blurred the line between licit and illicit violence through the redefinition of the *kamajors* in the categories of the state, rather than their previous existence as loosely organized defenders of their communities (96).

Hoffman emphasizes the difference between social institutions and social relations in describing the *kamajors*, which he asserts are entirely new and not merely an extension of secret societies. He examines relationships of patronage as a force that – like the war machine itself – has been captured by a global logic of the flows of resources and capital, rendering logical the movement of the *kamajors* into the capital, Freetown. Hoffman sees the city as a space of creative manipulation and resistance for youth who want to avoid the traditional forces of patronage and

obligation (147), simultaneously as it is a zone of excess production of violent youth labor, as youth gather at the barracks and wait to be deployed to some patron's purpose. The combination of manipulation, production, evasion, and waiting become the *topos* of postmodernity.

This is a novel departure from most previous studies of youth and violence in Africa, and as such it is a necessary and provocative addition to the literature. Few books situate warring African bodies within their global context and specifically disavow the possibility that violence is nested in a cultural past (as is suggested in many studies from around Africa) that there is a parent "culture" to which this violence or its "work" both refers to and is drawn from. Rather, violence exists in a shifting terrain of possibilities that transcend culture and history. Hoffman takes a cue from Henrik Vigh's work on youth navigating the terrain of war in Guinea-Bissau, though nesting it firmly in the global present, a much larger terrain than Vigh's nation-state.

I see the primary weakness of Hoffman's argument in an overstatement of the difference between social institutions and social relations, and the relationship of both to "premodern" versus "modern" Africa, and thus also to "postmodern" Africa. The book's conclusion clouds the very notion of "modern," "global" Africa – by which the *kamajors* exist as a war machine and thus an emergent phenomenon – by stating that fundamental facets of African sociality, from kinship to the occult, are the "most modern" practices existing today. These emerged in the wake of the slave trade, which marked Africa's initial incorporation into global logics of extraction and capitalism. If *kamajor* mobilization draws on the same cultural capital as did other projects organizing young male violence in the wake of the slave trade, does that make it an entirely new phenomenon? When do we mark the departure of the postmodern from the modern, by which the *kamajors* exist in a different logic than did previous organizations of young male violence emanating from patronage relations? For example, Hoffman is clear that the civil militias were organized along the lines of patron-client relationships and not by "traditional military logic." I believe he makes too much of the difference between the *kamajors* and the military, and thus the difference between the "modern" and the "postmodern." From the beginning of the postcolonial era, the military was an arm of patronage, especially during Siaka Stevens' reign, and the incorporation of the *kamajors* into the state was a direct result of Tejan Kabbah shifting patronage from the army of his predecessors to a force that he could control. The conclusion clouds the reader's understanding of the transition between modern and postmodern and the difference between institutions and relations. Hoffman thus dampens the power of his heuristic device at the precise moment he should reemphasize it. However, this is more than compensated for by the wealth of material he brings to bear on our understanding of youth violence.

Catherine Bolten

**Hollan, Douglas W., and C. Jason Throop** (eds.): *The Anthropology of Empathy. Experiencing the Lives of Others in Pacific Societies*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2011. 233 pp. ISBN 978-0-85745-102-6. (ASA Studies in Pacific Anthropology, 1) Price: \$ 75,00

This book follows on the heels of a special issue of *Ethos* (2008) devoted to empathy, edited by the same scholars. Both volumes announce a rediscovery of this topic across a range of disciplines. Why now? In their introduction, the editors suggest that anthropologists were put off empathy for a generation by Clifford Geertz's influential and exclusive focus on the public forms of knowledge, on the cultural framing rather than the subjective qualia of experience. Geertz's interpretivism inspired many fine-grained accounts of the person that enriched the literature but somehow left out actual persons. It was as if the concepts, symbols, and cultural models had the experiences on the actor's behalf. As a consequence of this approach, emotions tended to be dismissed as private sensations, amenable to neither observation nor analysis; either that, or they became grist for the interpretivist mill, cultural items like any other. Contrary voices that argued for transcultural common denominators persisted nonetheless. And phenomenologically-inspired anthropologists continued to assert the primacy of the body, the experiencing self, or other avatars of consciousness. The door was left open for a return of empathy.

While going over some of the same ground, what the new book adds to the *Ethos* volume is a regional focus on the Pacific intended to identify common patterns and facilitate comparison. In this venture it admirably succeeds. Among the cultural themes pursued by contributors are the inscrutability of other minds, the notion that empathy must be practiced rather than merely felt, a focus on the exchange of food as the medium of mutual concern, and a regional prizes of love or compassion. (As some contributors suggest, the latter value is possibly a result of Christianization, even if, in many cases, behind the injunction to "Love Thy Neighbour" lies fear of thy neighbour's witchcraft.)

The central paradox of the book is that none of the societies described possesses an explicit concept of empathy; indeed, many hold to a view of the "opacity of other minds" (a notion not confined to the Pacific). If empathy depends upon achieving an accurate "first-person-like perspective on another," then a study of empathy in the Pacific would seem to be a nonstarter. Fortunately, despite the ideological disclaimer, Pacific peoples evidently share the panhuman capacity to respond to others' needs, to identify with others' distress, and to put themselves imaginatively in another's predicament: in a word, to empathize. The fascination of the collection lies in this ethnographic contradiction between practical empathy and ideological denial. And there is, perhaps, a further contradiction – one that could have been more fully explored. If people like the Yape (described by Throop) find other minds opaque, why do they go to such lengths to dissemble and evade? Conversations held back-to-back, staring away from interlocutors, or conducted in evasive banter might be presumed to suggest the opposite: an assumption