

Rezensionen

Andersson Trovalla, Ulrika: *Medicine for Uncertain Futures. A Nigerian City in the Wake of a Crisis.* Uppsala: Uppsala University, 2011. 214 pp. ISBN 978-91-554-8054-7. (Uppsala Studies in Cultural Anthropology, 50) Price: SEK 226.00

Jos is a major city in central Nigeria, located on a plateau that constitutes one of the most ethno-linguistically diverse parts of Africa. The city is about a hundred years old, having been established in the early colonial period with the expansion of tin mining on the Jos Plateau, within what was then the Northern Region of Nigeria. With the growth of the mining industry there was an inflow of labourers and traders from different parts of Nigeria onto the Plateau. Jos was initially a city of migrants, and in some respects has remained so. This has given rise to disputes over “ownership” of Jos, based around conceptions of indigeneity. From the outset the town’s inhabitants were divided along regional lines by the British colonial authorities – Northerners resided in the Native Town and Southerners in the Township – and there was a divide between the urbanised population of Jos and the existing agricultural communities of the Jos Plateau, most of which resided in villages and dispersed hill settlements outside of town. Ulrika Andersson Trovalla outlines this history at the beginning of the book. Yet despite these obvious social divisions, until little more than a decade ago Jos was known to Nigerians as a relaxed city and was even a holiday destination, due to its cool climate and picturesque setting in the central Nigerian highlands. This has now changed, as Jos became a flashpoint for collective violence and is currently militarised. As Andersson Trovalla writes, “Jos used to be seen as a peaceful place, but in 2001 it was struck by clashes that arose from what was [*sic*] largely understood as issues of ethnic and religious belonging.”

The “crisis” referred to in the subtitle of the book is the collective violence that has occurred intermittently for a decade between Muslims and Christians in Jos. The book mainly concentrates on the 2001 crisis, but as Andersson Trovalla acknowledges, there have been several more large riots in Jos since 2001 – especially from 2008. However, this temporal focus is in some ways one of the book’s strengths, because the author carried out her initial period of fieldwork in Jos before the violence of September 2001, and her main period of fieldwork afterwards. The emphasis on uncertainty and change in the urban setting of Jos in the wake of the crisis undoubted-

ly reflects the calamitous impact of the 2001 violence on the population of the city, when an estimated 1,000 people were killed in less than a week. But this is an original contribution to the growing literature on the “Jos crisis” primarily because it approaches it from an unusual angle: through the trials and tribulations of some of the city’s practitioners of “traditional medicine” (Hausa: *maganin gargajiya*). The best parts of the book show how this assortment of “traditional” doctors and healers fared in the aftermath of the crisis and how their belief systems have been put to use both in diagnosis and healing and as “poison” against rivals.

The book consists of nine chapters and describes different aspects of the Jos crisis and its consequences. The most interesting parts of the story concern the traditional medicine practitioners and the division that occurred in their union – the Plateau State branch of the National Union of Medical Herbal Practitioners (NUMHP) – after the 2001 riot. In the aftermath of the conflict Jos became more religiously divided, with “no-go areas,” “no-go times,” blocked roads, and competing prayers emanating from churches and mosques. The visual, spatial, temporal, auditory, and written expressions of social polarisation are thus examined. The lack of trust that emerged among the factions of the NUMHP is described. One particular dispute even went to court, forming the basis for one of the chapters – “The Court System as Counter-Medicine.” A chapter called “Poisonous Movements” is perhaps the most informative, and mentions poisoning accusations between practitioners, which seems akin to witchcraft – “[w]ith the crisis, the other’s medicine turned into poison” (91). It also highlights phenomena that have been recorded in other parts of the world – rumours of “evil phone calls” and “killer numbers,” but also violent rumours that form part of the dynamics of collective violence, transmitted via radio or word of mouth. The book contains some good photographs but it lacks maps: there is no street map of Jos and no map of Nigeria to show readers where Jos is located.

This ethnography is not without shortcomings. It is a multifaceted work that was carried out in a complex urban setting where there are many different, and at times contradictory, narratives of conflict. These varying narratives are not properly explored, but that may have been deliberate. The book does not convey any strong arguments, and the ethnographic narrative is fragmented and often anecdotal. The theoretical approach adopted is stated to

be “pragmatism,” and there are quotes from John Dewey and others interspersed throughout the text. To this reader, these theoretical diversions were incongruous and obscured the analysis rather than illuminating it. There is in places a poor discernment as to which observations to include and which to exclude. While good ethnography usually builds on an analysis of the mundane, of everyday life, there is surely also a need to avoid becoming banal or too trivial in one’s observations. To cite one example (62 f.): “As a frontier, the university wall with its gates held a paradox. It was simultaneously the point of differentiation and where the two places came together. The gates had the potential to open up communication as well as shut it down.” Surely that is just what gates do; there is no paradox! There is also hyperbole: “Just as every new footstep holds the potential to form the world to come, so does every blocked footstep” (77).

There are some contentious points of interpretation and emphasis, and some errors. On the “Middle Belt” it is written that “its location between northern and southern Nigeria has brought with it that it is here [*sic*] that the tensions between Christianity and Islam acquire their most combustible force” (18). Furthermore, in the Middle Belt “Christianity and ethnic groups perceived to be ‘indigenes’ are on one side, and Islam and groups perceived to [be] ‘settlers’ are on the other” (18). In fact, the Middle Belt is a political expression and refers to a movement begun by Christian minority politicians in the 1940s/50s in the defunct Northern Region. Its geographical parameters are ill-defined, but it is certainly *not* true that all Muslim groups in this area are settlers. Even within ethnic minority groups across the “Middle Belt,” Plateau State included, there are a large number of Muslims who are recognised as “indigenes,” distinct from Hausa Muslims in the “far north.” Ethnic groups like the Nupe (Niger), Eggon (Nasarawa), Tangale, Tera (Gombe), and Pyem, Yangkam, and Goemai (Plateau) (the author uses the Hausa ethnonym “Ankwai” in the book, which is no longer used by most Goemai people) and many more are either majority Muslim or have substantial Muslim minorities, yet are “Middle Belt peoples.” I raise this point because the terms “indigene” and “settler” are employed throughout much of the text, but these categories are not well problematised. These are not accurate sociological categories, and even in the Jos case the Muslims come from diverse backgrounds; they are not simply “Hausa-Fulani.” Also, the (non-exhaustive) list given in footnote 5, p. 19, of Plateau ethnic groups misspells most of their names: it should read Ngas (not Nges), Goemai or Gamai (not Geomal), Yiwom (not Youm), Aten (not Atem) and – preferably – Ron (not Challa) and Afizere (not Jarawa). Although the book focuses on urban Jos, knowledge of the region and of the ethnographic context of the Jos Plateau is important for understanding what is happening in the city, but this seems to be lacking.

What’s more, the book does not show how the crisis in Jos affected different parts of the city in different ways. There are even some inaccuracies. For instance, the 2001 rioting did not spread into the university (61); there was a stand-off near the gates but no violence in-

side. There are still a significant number of Christians, especially Igbos, living and trading around Enugu Street and adjacent to *masallacin juma’a* (the central mosque) – it is not “only Muslims” there (43). Some issues are also taken at face value, without real analysis. The book gives only a Christian perspective of the impact of the global “War on Terror” in Jos, not a Muslim one. The streets in Muslim areas like Angwan Rogo were not “renamed” as such; references to “shari’a line,” “Zamfara,” “Jerusalem” etc. were more like nicknames used in particular neighbourhoods during the crisis; they have not replaced the actual place-names and are not really in general use. There is also a problem in the text with controversial or prejudiced statements by informants being cited without being properly examined or challenged. This leads to bias in some places, particularly against the Muslim side (e.g., pp. 63–64). In such instances, the authorial voice, providing what may be a more autonomous view, is also needed. Finally, the book would have benefited from better proof reading, as there are quite a few typographical errors in the text.

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Antweiler, Christoph: Mensch und Weltkultur. Für einen realistischen Kosmopolitismus im Zeitalter der Globalisierung. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2011. 321 pp. ISBN 978-3-8376-1634-7. (Der Mensch im Netz der Kulturen – Humanismus in der Epoche der Globalisierung, 10) Preis: € 29,80

Dass EthnologInnen umfassende Bücher zu global bedeutsamen Themen schreiben, ist eher die Ausnahme als die Regel. Und wenn zusätzlich der Anspruch gestellt wird, dass die Inhalte einer breiteren Leserschaft zugänglich und verständlich sein sollen, dann wird der Kreis bekannter Publikationen sogar noch enger gezogen. Dem Autor des vorliegenden Buches, Christoph Antweiler, Professor für Südostasienwissenschaft am Institut für Orient- und Asienwissenschaften der Universität Bonn, ist dieses Vorhaben jedoch in beispielhafter Weise geglückt. Dabei knüpft das vorliegende Buch nicht nur im Allgemeinen an Antweilers jahrelange wissenschaftliche Beschäftigung mit der Untersuchung von Kulturuniversalien an, sondern vor allem an zwei vorausgegangene Veröffentlichungen (“Was ist den Menschen gemeinsam? Über Kultur und Kulturen”, Darmstadt 2007; und “Heimat Mensch. Was uns alle verbindet”, Hamburg 2009), wobei gerade letztere aufgrund ihrer allgemein verständlichen Sprache größere Aufmerksamkeit in den Medien erfuhr. Im vorliegenden Buch beschäftigt sich Antweiler jedoch mit einer Problemstellung, die weit über die wissenschaftliche Erforschung und Nachweisbarkeit von Kulturuniversalien hinausgeht. Es geht ihm nämlich um die politisch relevante Frage, welche Lehren wir aus dem Wissen um kulturelle Universalien für das Zusammenleben in einer global vernetzten Welt ziehen können, auch wenn diese Frage nicht ganz so politisch formuliert ist, wie sie es hätte sein können, denn ihre normativen Aspekte sind, wie der Autor selbst betont, nicht zu leugnen.

Hauptziel des Buches ist es, mit empirisch untermauerten Argumenten zu zeigen, dass kulturelle Verschie-