

national debates of the 1940s. Soon after the partition of Kamerun, the rumblings of proto-nationalism could be heard, suggesting that the encounter between the peoples of Southern Cameroons and the earlier German colonial administration, while not solely responsible for the burgeoning nationalist movement, left an indelible mark on the region and its people. Peter Geschiere's contribution underscores the significance of violent encounters as part and parcel of history building and in the case of Buea the possibility that the violent encounters between the Germans and the local populations and the subsequent memories of this collision has mobilized the inhabitants of Buea to underscore their belonging to the exclusion of "strangers" infiltrating their "homeland."

The historical emphasis of Fowler and Fanso's edited volume continues with the contribution of Michael Mbapndah Ndobegang and Fiona Bowie's piece. It is with this chapter that Ndobegang and Bowie relocate the historical narrative of the encounter between the German trader and commercial agent Gustav Conrau and the Bangwa people to include the active engagement of subaltern voices that have previously been silenced in the attempt to create historical uniformity. Ute Röschenthaler engages in the re-emergence of a formerly "submerged" German colonial influence on the village of Nsakang and offers a cautionary tale regarding the reappropriation of colonial knowledge and more importantly teasing out the idea that we as anthropologists all too often forget. There is not one story, no matter how often we try to paint an image but rather recollections and reconstructions of history that are continuously being recreated.

The second half of the edited volume turns its focus on gender, development, and globalization with Caroline Ifeka's challenging and provocative contribution in which she not only asserts that the fertility practices of Anyang women have changed, but suggests that female fertility is an essential component in challenging "old cosmologies of biological reproduction and metaphysical renewal" (152). Margaret Niger-Thomas offers a retrospective examination of the *ndem* association, a formerly powerful female association that memorialized female leaders with large statues in the Banyang and Ejagham communities. Her piece attributes particular factors to the decline in the importance of the *ndem* association as well as other Cameroonian cultural associations. Bowie complements her earlier coauthored piece with Michael Mbapndah Ndobegang to address the transformation of fieldwork from the proverbial small village to a multi-sited approach which spans the globe and offers a fresh perspective on how anthropologists must learn to confront the anxiety of incorporating movement into their fieldwork as well as coming to terms with the notion that the boundedness that has intrigued anthropologists and been utilized to create realities has never existed. The penultimate chapter and perhaps the most riveting chapter gives the reader food for thought as Ludovic Lado unpacks two clashing discourses; one centered on the imposition of the Catholic doctrine on African cultures, the other pointing to the necessity of the "Africanization" of the Eucharist. Lado challenges both discourses and aims to resist the

"essentialist temptation." Providing the final comments to this volume are the words of Joyce Endeley and Nalova Lyonga, who return to the common thread weaving together each contribution, the indomitable spirit of Shirley Ardener and the positive ramifications of her role as the "human seed" in fostering international networks vis-à-vis her work within and outside of Cameroon.

After turning the last page and closing the book, one is left with profound admiration for not only the wonderful contributions to this edited volume but to the legacy of Shirley Ardener, a woman, mentor, and researcher whose encounter with Cameroon in 1961 left her transformed and transfixed, to which we all owe a tremendous thanks.

Anne-Elise Keen

**Geissler, Paul Wenzel, and Ruth Jane Prince:** *The Land is Dying. Contingency, Creativity, and Conflict in Western Kenya*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2010. 423 pp. ISBN 978-1-84545-481-4. (Epistemologies of Healing, 5) Price: \$ 95.00

If this book's title, from a Luo saying, suggests just one more volume of Afro-pessimism, it should not dissuade the curious reader. While not a light book, this is one for anyone seeking ethnographic understanding based on an equatorial African setting not to overlook.

Eastern Africa, and a Luo-speaking part of western Kenya in particular, have produced some exceptional collaborative anthropology in recent years. David William Cohen and E. S. Atieno Odhiambo have teamed up for historical and political anthropology, and Michael Dietler and spouse Ingrid Herbich for ethnography blended with archaeology. Now Wenzel Geissler and Ruth Prince, a pair who met, married, and reproduced in western Kenya themselves, have melded ethnography, public health research, and a locally grounded kind of philosophic reflection in a single, densely filled volume. It draws on the work of earlier ethnographers of Luo, some of them raised as Luo themselves; and it braids in personal recollections of married life and neighborly acquaintances with a rounded portrayal of their research site, and of Luo culture and society as represented there.

Physician-anthropologist Geissler, from Germany, and social anthropologist Prince, from England, resided between 2000 and 2002 (with other briefer visits before and after) in two homes in a rural community of about a thousand called Uhero, in Yimbo, an area severely hit by the HIV/AIDS epidemic, near the lake most still call Victoria. After local experience in international public health research, Geissler and Prince decided to move beyond its typical survey-dependent, sample-collecting methods, and well beyond its topical scope. The epidemic and its effects and local handling receive due attention in the book's course, but the authors refuse to let it take over their study, just as people in Uhero resist letting it take over their daily lives.

These are Kenyan Luo people up close and personal. The book's central, related themes are three, each with a physical dimension and an imaginative side too: touch, creative mixture, and the contingent potential for growth

through complementation. These are old themes, to be sure, but they are far from exhausted in ethnography, and nowhere are they been treated with more discernment or discretion. The book describes body contact and sharing without seeming touchy-feely. It describes people's thoughts and concerns about fluids, their mixture, and reproduction without getting carried away with biological reduction or sensational prurience. It shows how growth and progress can have no more to do with maturation and the passage of time, than with proper sequences of order and generational etiquette playing out in "everyday ritual" between kin and neighbors – taking account of those dead and not yet born. In this last respect, the attention to ordering principles, the book adds a distinctive Luo and African flavor to its topic.

Geissler and Prince confine most of their attention to Uhoro, reminding the reader of anthropology's traditional strengths in local-scale work using an indigenous, in this case Nilotic, tongue. They have refused to slide into thin platitudes about "-isms" and "-izations" like post-colonialism and globalization. But they have also avoided the hazard of some years-long stays in situ, of getting so embroiled in local politics, or gridlocked in conflicting stories, as to become unable to write. Here in vivid description are the births; the smeared walls and symbolic doorways; the stirred pots and shared meals; the illnesses and the corpses at funerals when things do not go quite right; and the dicey clinics, herbal healings, and relief of restored relations when they do. Here too are genealogies and homestead maps, and debates about building methods, fences, and pathways. The personalities and relationships involved in the copious case examples are realistically rendered, seldom conforming even to their parties' own ideals or stereotypes. Here too is sketched something of the mystical side, the perceived principles and power governing life's order – the ones that Luo people themselves do not claim to understand fully but treat no less as real.

The authors' main theoretical inspirations in writing are European. In the emphasis on momentary matters, daily life, and contingency, Geissler and Prince draw from Michel de Certeau and Emmanuel Lévinas, and in the focus on interpersonal connection, indirectly from Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, who called it "participation." The attention to social stresses and tensions is rather reminiscent too of Max Gluckman, Victor Turner, and the Manchester and Rhodes-Livingstone schools – but with added attention to local uncertainty and indeterminacy, more in keeping with recent ethnographic trends, and to crucial, fleeting moments of confluence. These moments, the authors insist, can generate either growth and wellbeing for family, lineage, and clan – or else death and destruction deemed possibly contagious in themselves. It is the uncertainty of outcomes, and the difficulty of following "customary" Luo rules and conventions amidst the messier twists and turns of daily life, personal character, and motive, that provide the tensions throughout the book.

The tensions and quandaries run along multiple lines, as locally felt. Along one dimension compete two ways of understanding personhood itself. In one of them, known

as a characteristically Luo way, humans are brought into being only by relationships and interactions: that which we share makes up our very essence. In another, perhaps more foreign-seeming way also locally known, persons are assumed to grow up separate, individual entities to start, and to become social beings in relationships only secondarily. Along other, related lines, the book compares and contrasts people who seek to follow or enforce "traditional" rules and unspoken expectations about precedence and sequencing – and others self-described as "Saved" Christians (here mainly Anglican), intent on minimizing the role of elders, ancestors, or any of what they consider "demons" associated with the local, "Earthly" past. These latter Protestants hope for clean order, square designs, and discrete times and spaces, but the authors suggest these "Saved" have trouble maintaining them in a western Kenyan context.

The traditional/modern and the local/Christian dichotomies too, should they seem too familiar, also have their ironies. A new development in the Luo country is public broadcasting by newly "conservative" elders proffering advice to inquiring listeners on how to hew to old (or newly cut-and-dried) custom for finding safety in new times and conditions, when the rules may need inevitably to be bent or exceptions or compromises made to meet unprecedented exigencies. How, for instance, to manage safely "customary" cycles of house building and abandonment now that there are "permanent" cement floors or walls, or rented rooms in towns? Or how to handle concerns like "proper" sequences of sexual intercourse with co-wives at planting season, under new exigencies of urban migration, the commonness of commercial sex work, and a risk of deadly new disease? It is not just the Luo rules and challenges of hard times the book describes, but the actual knotty cases in the intertwined lives of the ethnographers' acquaintances, the diverging opinions and conflicting advice, and the attempts somehow to make the best of things.

A short review can hardly do justice to the care behind the book or the local flavor it conveys: the accuracy of its translations, the sensitivity and empathy behind its life histories, the candor about research tactics and dilemmas. If it wears as I expect, the volume may well help cement the place of the Luo people, alongside their northern kin the Shilluk, Nuer, and Dinka, as among African ethnography's classic cases. Along the way, the authors and Ruth Tuchtenhagen have codirected an ethnographic documentary movie, "Adhiambo. Born in the Evening" (2001 – available from the Royal Anthropological Institute), on the months before and after two roughly simultaneous childbirths in Luo country – one of them their own child's. One further proof of the creative potential of mixing complementary things is the volume's mere existence (with the film's) as a product of a man and woman from different countries and disciplines – and of the many who locally helped them along – in such an effective, symbiotic collaboration. It is one warmly to be welcomed.

Parker Shipton