

# BOOK REVIEW

**Hansjörg Dilger, Astrid Bochow, Marian Burchardt, and Matthew Wilhelm-Solomon, eds. *Affective Trajectories: Religion and Emotion in African Cityscapes*.** Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2020. 311 pp. Acknowledgements. Photographs. Bibliography. Index. \$104.95. Cloth. ISBN: 978-1478005490.

This anthology, *Affective Trajectories: Religion and Emotion in African Cityscapes*, emanates from papers which were presented at a conference held in Berlin in 2015, linking eleven contributions that span case studies across the African continent. The common interest of these articles is the analysis of the multiple articulations of the affective states of Africans (within Africa and in the diaspora)—spurred by religious experiences—and their urban lives. These articulations are related to religion in a broad sense as well as to unfolding political struggles. The contributors embark on an ambitious journey to analyze the complex intertwining of religion in its various guises and their manifestations in African cityscapes within the conceptual framework the editors (Hansjörg Dilger, Astrid Bochow, Marian Burchardt, and Matthew Wilhelm-Solomon) have dubbed “affective trajectories.” These trajectories are “... pathways through space-time in which affects, emotions, and sentiments are mobilized simultaneously in coconstitutive ways” (15). The innovative concept of “affective trajectory” adds to our understanding of migration, whose prompting has thus far been predominantly material in nature.

The chapters cover urban sites in South Africa (Johannesburg and Cape Town); Zimbabwe (Harare); Nigeria (Abuja); West Africa (Lomé, Cotonou, Tema, Accra); DRC (Kinshasa); Spain (diasporan Africans in Bilbao); Ghana (Offinso); Botswana (Gaborone); and Uganda (diasporan Congolese refugees in Kampala). The religious denominations that are addressed are mainly related to Pentecostal practices but also to those of Islam. The contributors contend correctly that in urban studies, the phenomena of affect, emotion, and sentiment have not received adequate attention. They seek to rectify that imbalance by documenting through case studies how religion impacts decisively on the lives of urbanites. Migrants to the cities from rural areas where comparative social stability prevails encounter insecurity in the alien urban

sphere, notwithstanding their hopes and aspirations for a better life that lured or pushed them into the cities in the first place.

The urban insecurity of the migrants is mitigated through religious practice. For example, inner-city Johannesburg residents engage in “affective regeneration” to overcome their feelings of loss and despair. Similarly, criminals in Cape Town submit to “affective conversion” to become born-again Christians in response to Pentecostal “crusades.” In Harare, the members of the Masowe (Wilderness) Apostles reach back into their Shona history and take refuge in the Voice of Mwari (God). The chapter about Abuja as the “city of dreams” deals with both Christian and Islamic practices in “affective cityscapes” and points out significant similarities, while referring to contrasting Catholic modes of worship as stale and formal. One chapter discusses “religious sophistication” as the combination of affective religious practices and secular modern technologies, coalescing into the Kantian concept of *Vernunftreligion*.

The chapter centering on West Africa points to “social navigation” (pun probably intended) in search of an offshore hospital ship for purposes of healing. Some Kinshasa urbanites have adopted the tenets of the Church of World Messianity derived from Japan, with its emphasis on cleanliness and purification that has evolved into a “magical broom” in social work in city spaces. The chapter dealing explicitly with Africans in the diaspora in the Spanish city of Bilbao emphasizes the “portability” of the Holy Spirit. The Offinso chapter discusses the affective impact of Islamic prayers such as *id* and *salat*, both of which produce a sense of communal belonging. The Gaborone chapter dwells on the interface between religiosity and education among the middle-class residents, which is often characterized by tension relating to marriage, gender relations, and ties to family members who remain in the countryside. The multiple Pentecostal congregations in Kampala cater to the spiritual and material needs of traumatized refugees who have fled the violence in neighbouring DRC, whose trajectories are thus geographical as well as affective.

Anthologies are criticized—often unfairly—for leaving out certain themes. While accepting such a criticism as valid, the editors of this volume defend themselves by saying that no anthology coverage can be exhaustive. Even so, I cannot resist mentioning a few palpable omissions. The emphasis is justifiably on Pentecostalism, with its inherently affective theological import. But neglecting other important Christian denominations such as the Catholic and other mainstream churches (Anglican and Presbyterian) is surprising. Also, the strand of Pentecostalism that preaches the gospel of prosperity is absent, despite the flamboyant and luxurious lifestyles of some pastors, which often include private executive jets. Are these phenomena manifestations of “religious sophistication”? Or are they examples of excesses and perversions? Would not such exuberant consumption evoke affective responses among adherents who live in abject poverty? There is no escaping that contemporary realities anywhere and their historical antecedents are exceedingly complex and fuzzy. Even so, why do anthropologists use such

convoluted language that the readers' comprehension is thwarted? This volume is replete with extremely long sentences of up to seventy words between full stops, sometimes compounded by peculiar syntax. If read aloud, they would be breathing exercises and challenge the attention span of the reader. The coining of composite words is sometimes innovative and helpful, but often obfuscating and counter-intuitive. Overall, however, this anthology is a welcome addition to the body of migration literature that has tended to center on material conditions as the underlying driving force of the movement. An analytical perspective that highlights affections and emotions—religious or otherwise—is thus refreshing.

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