

the scheme's rhetoric of participation, local actors have little choice as to the way they manage the forestry resources on which they depend. They find their participation limited to carrying out activities initiated by outside actors. As the scheme's designers considered local actors merely as means of production for the management, conservation and most of all production of wood for the urban market, the various institutional arrangements established in the village serve not so much the empowerment of local actors and the strengthening of their control over resources, but rather the furthering of administrative control.

This book constitutes a fine work of anthropology of development, situating the local field in the wider context constituted by national and, to a lesser extent, international forestry conservation policy, and tying up various related issues of topical interest to development, such as the role of customary authorities in decentralization and democratization, the dynamics of migration and land tenure, and the commoditization of natural resources.

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MIRJAM DE BRUIJN, RIJK VAN DIJK and JAN-BART GEWALD (eds), *Strength Beyond Structure: social and historical trajectories of agency in Africa*. Leiden and Boston MA: Brill (pb \$61.00/€41.00 – 978 9 00415 696 8). 2007, 352 pp.

This collection, edited by de Bruijn, van Dijk and Gewalt, treads similar ground to Chabal, Engel and de Haan's collection, *African Alternatives*. The premise of *Strength Beyond Structure* is to develop the notion of 'agency' in Africa as a counterpoint to Afro-pessimism and to consider how agency is realized through social strength developed in negotiating constraints. This collection asserts the need to consider the 'promise of agency', rather than the 'premise of agency', as a process of becoming that is influenced by a variety of relational and contextual factors. The case studies emphasize the possibilities, innovations and strategies of social strength that are used to negotiate and overcome the constraints and limitations of everyday life.

The first substantive chapter addresses the role played by the 'Manchester School' of anthropologists in the development of agency. Alongside an historical synopsis of agency in anthropology, van Binsbergen critiques Evans-Pritchard's *The Nuer* from the Manchester School's perspective and points to some of the strengths and weaknesses of different anthropological approaches in relation to agency. The next chapter, by Brinkman, analyses the links between dreams, agency and resistance in the Angolan independence struggle. Drawing on one soldier's dream accounts, Brinkman argues that contextual interpretations and utilizations of dreams give further layers to discussions of agency, bridging the worlds of night and day, soul and body. An unusual contribution, this chapter reiterates the importance of social, spatial and temporal contextualization of discussions around agency. The problem of agency in historical research is pursued further in Gewalt's chapter, which re-emphasizes the need to recognize structure *and* agency in analysis. Through a biography of Hosea Kutako, a Herero chief, Gewalt analyses how Kutako negotiated structural and contextual constraints to pursue

Namibian independence. Whilst further analysis would have strengthened this chapter, it provides a useful exploration of how agency can be interpreted in life histories.

The subsequent chapters move to address the contemporary period. Van Beek examines how Kapsiki religious beliefs in Nigeria and Cameroon inform actions and agency which need contextual consideration. Ndaya's chapter on Congolese '*Combats spirituels*' is not translated from the French original. Widlok's chapter remains concerned with the spiritual sphere, linking consideration of social agency with the performativity, meanings and experiences of trance dances amongst San groups in Namibia. These are shown as being multiple, dynamic, conventional, innovative and imbued with agency for participating individuals; the argument is that agency must be viewed as an attribute of cultural forms as well as social groupings and individuals.

In Chapter 8, Moyo turns our attention to the role of agency in family and household coping strategies in urban Zimbabwe. Whilst the data presented in the case study vignettes are powerful, Moyo skims over important discussions around religious groupings and the role of the political and socio-economic situation in Zimbabwe in framing agency. The next chapter, by Draper, Spierenburg and Wels, focuses on nature conservation in South Africa. They contrast the agency of (white) authors and painters in depicting a certain type of African landscape with loss of agency by the African population, who are expected to blend into the background. These historical practices are then linked to recent conservation practices in South Africa and the role of black and white elites in perpetuating these types of representation. In the following chapter Janssen shows how agency is at work in practices of childbirth in Niger, as mothers-to-be negotiate the local social context in collecting information and making conscious decisions in the practice of solitary childbirth so as to avoid shame.

The final chapters consider agency and identity. De Bruijn's contribution analyses how street children in N'djaména, Chad, act out agency in a marginal social position whilst challenging assumptions of normality and marginality to highlight how street children make conscious decisions and use agency to survive. Chapter 12, by Pelckmans, considers agency and memory in the negotiation of social status. Drawing on two Malian women's transitions from rural to urban spaces, Pelckmans provides insights into their agency in negotiating ascribed and achieved social status and social obligations. Pelckmans shows how social status both promotes and constrains agency as individuals mediate different social contexts and expectations. Van Dijk's chapter then advocates the idea of vulnerable agency by examining the affirmative use of vulnerability and agency by a Pentecostal church in Botswana to overcome the constraints resulting from a lack of supportive social structures. Nyamnjoh's epilogue rounds out the collection by posing a series of questions to academics and researchers with an interest in agency in Africa.

The collection provides an eclectic range of case studies which engage with structure–agency dynamics in a variety of African contexts that will engage a wide audience. The theme of agency is at times underdeveloped as large sections of the contributions are dedicated to description, although the collection remains a useful stepping-off point for those wishing to push the concepts presented further.

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