

BOOK REVIEWS

ANTHROPOLOGY AND SOCIOLOGY

Carola Lentz. *Land, Mobility, and Belonging in West Africa.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013. xiv + 331 pp. List of Illustrations. References. Index. \$30.00. Paper.

There is a certain kind of scholar, turning up, it seems, as often in Germanic academies as anywhere, who picks a carefully circumscribed topic, studies it to death . . . and then studies it some more, until it somehow springs back to life. Carola Lentz was already a well-published authority on northern Ghana and on issues of ethnicity when she wrote this book about first-comers and latecomers in this region and in an adjacent part of rural Burkina Faso in the Black Volta region. It is well known, too, that Jack Goody and other ethnographers got there first. Dagara people, among others Lentz describes, will be familiar to readers already acquainted with those Goody called LoWiili and LoDagaba. (Lentz notes the controversy over these terms.) But whereas Goody made his name largely on the breadth of his geographical and topical reach, Lentz's work is distinguished by the intensity of its focus. Not soon is anyone likely to cover her chosen topic and place more thoroughly.

The two main ethnic groups studied in this volume are the Sisala and Dagara. Over much of the terrain that is covered, it seems that ancestors of Sisala people got there first and ancestors of Dagara came later, often with Sisala permission. But Dagara tended to invite others to join them in their new settlement, and they grew so quickly in numbers that for many the welcome wore thin. And sometimes the authority that their erstwhile hosts may have extended or conceded with grace was later retracted by their descendants when population densities rose and times grew tougher.

This, then, is a study of West African exploratory travel, settlement, and ethnic intermixing. It also looks at conflicting claims by priests over local earth shrines, as well as layers of overrule, not least by European colonial powers who complicated the picture by establishing chiefs in places where such central authorities were not respected or even considered necessary. So alongside earth shrine priests, with fuzzy boundaries over their turf, came new chiefs imposing sharper, more exclusionary ones. Here was a

situation tailor made for tensions and power struggles. Often, Lentz is careful to point out, early-comers and latecomers found ways of resolving their differences, and the region has remained a generally peaceful one. But sometimes tensions have erupted into protracted disputes and open fighting.

In many ways, oral histories about primacy seem to change in each telling, but Lentz is careful not to overgeneralize and her contentions are grounded. She has conducted both in-depth interviews and surveys over dozens of villages, and she has covered the literature in English, French, and German. The bibliography is extensive but, like the rest of the book, laserlike in focus. This is a work of a writer confident enough to keep its theory concealed in the substructure or percolating through by allusion. The book may or may not endure in the canon like Robert Rattray's, Meyer Fortes's, Jack Goody's, or Esther Goody's earlier Ghanaian ethnographies, but it certainly joins the more recent works of Sara Berry, Christian Lund, Peter Geschiere, and others who have been building up the study of African autochthony and allochthony and all the hot politics that these issues involve.

Exhaustive as this study is, it still leaves room for future contributions. One needed line of approach is birth order and the ways it affects authority struggles and the tendencies of individuals or groups to migrate or stay put. Another important topic is children's games (think of checkers, chess, or Monopoly) and the ideas they teach about inclusion, exclusion, or the activities of owners and first-comers (such as charging rent). A third is to fold new discoveries in neuroscience about instinct and learning into the study of human groups as they mix and resettle: for instance, how do neural pathways converge or diverge to distinguish in-groups and out-groups; or how do shifting hormonal balances throughout the personal and family development cycles condition human tendencies of accommodation or territorial aggression? And with new contributions from neuroscience and ethology, studies of human spatial relations can intersect, more than they have for decades, with studies of other animal species. Much remains to be asked and maybe answered along these lines. Some of it may take another generation.

The book may seem, at first perusal, to be one for area specialists only. But its potential reach is broader. The "land" of the title refers to a very broad territory and concept: a home, a subsistence resource, and a power base. "Mobility," not so much long-distance or circular, is here more gradual and local. And "belonging," with all its ambiguities, scope for interpersonal misunderstandings, and capacity to ignite volatile emotions, is a similarly broad and powerful concept and experience. For any reader who wishes to study any of these three topics seriously—and to cross national, linguistic, and disciplinary boundaries in the process—this book will show you how it can be done.

Parker Shipton
 Boston University
 Boston, Mass
 shipton@bu.edu

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