

## Reviews of books

Karen Lauterbach, *Christianity, Wealth, and Spiritual Power in Ghana*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan (hb £89.99 – 978 3 319 33493 6). 2017, xvii + 221 pp.

Karen Lauterbach's carefully crafted book explores charismatic pastorship in the context of Asante history and practice. In seven chapters, Lauterbach shows that Asante pastorship resonates strongly with understandings of power that predate colonial rule, even though they have been transformed in different ways over the decades. Thus, even as charismatic pastors act as cultural and spiritual innovators, they draw on, and combine, existing socio-political and religious registers of power to achieve success and become 'big men'.

After an introduction that sets out the book's main themes, the second chapter focuses on social mobility and achievement in twentieth-century Kumasi. Although new groups relied first on business skills and later on education and state patronage to rise in influence, their social status and leverage were always understood as the result of both political and spiritual power. From the 1980s and 1990s onwards, the ability of charismatic pastors to offer their followers access to spiritual power enabled many of them to build up other forms of wealth and influence. The mutual implication of different forms of power is revealed in the third chapter, which shows that debates seeking to distinguish between true and false pastors, or between legitimate and fake wealth, are refracted not only through pastors' ability to mobilize large congregations but also in their ability to provide for their members.

Tracing the personal trajectories of different pastors, Chapters 4 and 5 challenge interpretations that locate the appeal of Pentecostal Christianity in its authoritative understanding of, and access to, a Western and capitalist culture that dominates and exploits Africa. Lauterbach shows that not all pastors are successful, and explains that even those who eventually do become successful must pass through lengthy and often humiliating apprenticeships under more senior pastors on whom they rely for spiritual guidance and blessings as much as for learning more mundane pastoral duties and for legitimacy. As aspiring and established pastors struggle to be part of networks and relationships that ensure a flow of blessings, spiritual power and legitimacy, their work cannot be reduced to the provision of a product that fulfils an abstract ideological need.

Moreover, despite a rhetoric of rupture, Asante pastors are not so much concerned with the rejection of the past as with its transformation. Thus, even as concerns over family or ancestral curses are widespread, pastors do not normally advise believers to cut family ties. Instead, they draw on their spiritual power to neutralize or ward off the negative influence of such curses on the lives of their followers. By taking responsibility for extended families rather than advocating distance, Asante pastors do not stand for a form of Christianity that diminishes the importance of family and produces a wholly new self; rather, it redefines family ties – and the individual – in a Christian idiom.

By contributing this significant case study to a wider literature on Christian practice across Africa – and, indeed, the anthropology of Christianity – Lauterbach also illuminates an important dynamic in the spread of charismatic Christianity beyond Africa. As Christianity attracts young men (and, less frequently, women) to pastorship because it is linked to ways of life that are empowering, aspiring pastors seek followers and opportunities both at home and in the diaspora and play an important role in the expansion of this form of Christian practice beyond Asante. Thus, even if the export of charismatic

Christianity from Ghana to the rest of the world reflects wider global processes, it is also shaped by the social and spiritual dynamics of Asante.

Overall, the book's contributions derive from its close engagement with social relations on the ground. By understanding the historical trajectories of Asante social practice, and by generalizing from her observations, interviews and impressions, Lauterbach draws on many years of fieldwork to offer an understanding of Christianity and pastorship that challenges preconceived ideas and offers new and original insights and suggestions for future research. The ability to offer such insights relies on the author's commitment to the society and the people she has studied, and, by extension, on her willingness to learn from the people she describes, to take them seriously, and to accept their view of the world.

Offering a fresh and elegantly understated engagement with would-be and successful Asante pastors, Lauterbach's book will appeal not only to scholars and students of Africa and African Christianity but also to those interested in global or extra-European Christianity. Affirming the value of studying African societies from the ground up, this book is required reading for scholars interested in the day-to-day lives, ambitions and experiences of African Christians.

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Iolanda Pensa *et al.*, *Public Art in Africa: art and urban transformation in Douala*. Geneva: Mētis Presses (pb €38 – 978 2 94 0563 16 6). 2017, 240 pp.

'La Passerelle de Bessengué' is a wooden footbridge in the Bessengué Akwa settlement, one of the poorest neighbourhoods of coastal Douala, Cameroon. It was among the first public artworks realized under the auspices of the triennial Salon Urbain de Douala (SUD), which is run by doual'art, an association established in 1991 to support public art in the city. 'La Passerelle', designed by Cameroonian artist Alioum Moussa, offers an apt shortcut to introduce SUD, and the work of public art in Douala. As such, it conveys the significance of *Public Art in Africa*, a book dedicated to expanding the audience of the SUD project well beyond Douala.

In the text (and in the associated travelling exhibition titled 'Making Douala 2007–2017'), the bridge is categorized as a 'proximity artwork' – an architectural or infrastructural installation with a purpose specifically relevant to those living in the given area. At first sight, this category is the clearest indication of the ways in which doual'art's founders, curators and artists conceptualize the link between public art and urban transformation. By connecting Bessengué Akwa to one of the busiest roads of the city, 'La Passerelle' has enabled people to commute to and from the settlement and has made possible the provision of much-needed public services. As a result – unintended but unsurprising – it has carved out a piece of public space in a neighbourhood where none existed before (p. 27): a square that now hosts street vendors and art installations, couples on dates and children at play.

While these changes doubtless qualify as urban transformation at the neighbourhood level, when placed in the archive of public art that this book offers, further layers of the work of 'La Passerelle' are revealed. From the original conception of a footbridge to the discussion of local identity and conflict prompted by the reconciliatory symbolism of the proposed handrails that form a colourful