

that morally critique the key ethos of capitalist nations: namely the defining social value placed upon consumption and commoditisation. The allure of wealth and desire produced from nothing reached its pinnacle in the global economy. The widely used phrase “occult economy” captures this zeitgeist where in Johannesburg, lacking the resources to draw upon the celebratory discourses of neoliberalism that everyone would be set free to speculate and accumulate, to consume and indulge repressed desires, individuals turn instead to the mystical – zombie cannibals, werewolves, and witchcraft – to protect themselves from imagined enemies and to achieve wealth beyond their dreams.

In relation to the global economy, Oduwale in a chapter entitled “The Relevance of Occult and Paranormal Phenomenon in West Africa in the Era of Globalisation” argues that occult phenomena do not contribute to the goals of globalisation at all. Witchcraft is seen as a threat to communal life (125). He asks, “[W]hat is the sense of hanging on to a belief that leads to pain rather than pleasure” (125)? He looks at measures to reduce and if possible eradicate occult beliefs in society and refers to a poverty of the mind among people looking for extraordinary means of achieving wealth and prosperity. Rapidly adapting cosmopolitan ideas, morals and values about the occult become ahistorical universal beliefs “existing in all ages, cultures and civilizations” (3). Witchcraft beliefs, which are firmly rooted in dynamic social relationships become simply popular beliefs whose verification cannot be tested as beliefs, Oduwale argues, and are believed as soon as they are proclaimed (115). Bere, and Osei, however, provide a counter to such Eurocentric paradigms of investigation by trying to deconstruct the “logic” of Western rationality and the racist assumptions underpinning colonial and postcolonial education in West Africa. Likewise, Agbakoba looks at the occult in relation to Igbo language and cultural setting. He follows the words *amosu* loosely translated as witch and the related words *ammagba* translated as witchcraft. He argues that “the traditional” worldview is voluntaristic and vitalist and examines how new forms of rituals are required to harness and channel psychic energies and mental states in the modern setting (31).

Harnischfeger also provides a very interesting account about the crusade of the prophetess Ngozi in Nsukka, Nigeria. Interestingly, her crusade is against the very purveyors of so-called traditional religion – sorcerers, witches, and shrine-priests – whom many would see as her allies. Indeed, Ngozi sees herself as a moderniser engaged in a spiritual battle with evil, stepping into the gap left in Alor Uno by the Nigerian state which has lost, it is claimed, all legitimacy (230). Indeed, Harnischfeger provides a fine case for arguing that the multicultural diversity found in Nigeria means that there is no universally accepted way of dealing with evil. A good epitaph, indeed, for dealing with fear and anxiety in the global economy where Asiegbu, in the final chapter, concludes that an ultimate explanation for occult beliefs is always open-ended.

Jane Parish

Olúpòṇà, Jacob K.: City of 201 Gods. Ilé-Ifè in Time, Space, and the Imagination. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011. 334 pp. ISBN 978-0-520-26556-1. Price: £ 19.95

Ifè or Ilé-Ifè is the cultural centre of Yorubaland and beyond and it is certainly one of the most remarkable ancient cities of sub-Saharan Africa. Nevertheless, judging from the available publications, up till now the city has aroused little scholarly endeavour. Apart from articles and pamphlets on various aspects of its culture, the interested reader can rely on only two comprehensive publications: a thin but solid monograph on the culture of Ilé-Ifè by the American anthropologist William Bascom (The Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria. New York 1969), and a more extensive book on the sculptures of the town, their dating and the historical traditions of Ilé-Ifè by the British archaeologist Frank Willett (Ife in the History of West African Sculpture. London 1967). In comparison with the extensive recent writings on Timbuktu, the other great religious centre of West Africa, the body of available publications is meagre. Even more striking is the unbalance in the coverage of the two cities in the Wikipedia. In August 2012, Ilé-Ifè was described in 2,000 words, and Timbuktu in 12,000 words in the English-speaking edition. The respective fame of the two cities can also be gauged from the number of articles devoted to them in Wikipedia worldwide at the same time – Ilé-Ifè being dealt with in 21 languages and Timbuktu in 69. This surprising disparity seems to be mainly due to the lack of publications, rather than to the lack of scholarly interest.

Holding since 2006 a professorship for African traditional religions at Harvard University, Jacob Olúpòṇà is in an excellent position to promote research on Ilé-Ifè. As the son of a prominent Anglican priest, as a former lecturer at the University of Ilé-Ifè and as a holder of several American research grants, he was able to conduct his research in the town in favourable conditions on a long-term basis from 1989 to 2004. However, on account of his well-known Christian loyalties he was denied initiation into the Qbàtálá cult group – and presumably into others as well – so that he was refused access to valuable in-depth information only available to people after initiation (157). Yet, since most aspects of the traditional religion in the town are open to a wider public, a native Yorùbá and speaker of the language automatically has access to many relevant items of information as soon as he credibly conveys the impression of his general sympathy for the *òrìṣà* cults – the cults of the proverbial 201 deities of the city. Having worked on the traditional cults of Ilé-Ifè with similar research interests since the year 2000, the present reviewer wishes to set the book into perspective by pointing out its special focus, its positive aspects, and its shortcomings. Hopefully, the following remarks will contribute to promote further research on the most relevant aspects of the quickly disappearing great traditional civilization of the Yorùbá.

As a whole, the book provides a comprehensive survey of the main festivals of Ilé-Ifè, it attracts attention to the danger presented by the forces of change in undermining the traditional order of the town and the palace,

it criticises the sowing of intolerance by Euro-American extremist Christian values and it pleads in favour of a tolerant approach towards indigenous Yorùbá cultures and traditions. By drawing attention to wide comparisons with such diverse societies as ancient China, India, and the Aztecs and by introducing numerous theoretical considerations on the basis of general religious studies, it greatly contributes to the revaluation of the traditional religion of Ilé-Ifè. Therefore, this study from the holder of the Nigerian National Merit Award (2007) is certainly a very welcome support for the *òrìṣà* devotees in their present struggle for survival.

The book is divided into three parts of unequal weight and it is throughout guided by the awareness that in our days the ancient worldview and spirituality of Ilé-Ifè are fast disappearing. The first part deals with previous scholarship concerning the religious life of the town, and it considers the traditional cosmology believed in and reenacted by its inhabitants. It concentrates on Leo Frobenius, Frank Willett, and William Bascom, but neglects significant authors in the present debate. The second and most extensive part describes the five major festivals dedicated to the most important deities of the town. It will be considered more in detail below. The third part investigates the modern challenges facing the traditional religion as a result of the support accorded by the king, and more particularly by the senior queen, to Evangelical endeavours and their introduction of ostentatious Christian rituals into the palace. It deals with the pivotal role of sacred kingship for the *òrìṣà* cults, but it does not attempt to investigate the still perceptible relations between the palace and the cult groups.

By connecting their mythical and ritual aspects, Olúpòṇà describes the five great festivals of Ilé-Ifè in considerable detail. However, focussing only on the principal deity of each festival, he conveys the impression that each celebration is devoted exclusively to its major deity. With respect to the Qlójó festival, central to the sacred kingship of Ilé-Ifè (111–143), he mentions that the festival myth is not alone dedicated to Ògún, the deity of iron and war, but also to Odùduwà and Ọ̀rànmiyàn, the legendary founders of the kingdoms of Ilé-Ifè and Ọ̀yó (112–114); yet these remarks are not backed up by a corresponding account of the rituals carried out by the cult groups of the two other deities. He also refers to the half-red and half-white colouring of the bodies of the royal Lókolóko servants (he writes “red and white spots”) as symbols for the mixed origin of Ọ̀rànmiyàn – who is supposed to have been a son of both Ògún and Odùduwà – but he does not indicate whether the devotees of these two other deities also play a role in the Qlójó festival. In line with this lack of precision, the author designates Erédùmí, the chief priest of Ọ̀rànmiyàn, and Akogun, an Ìhàrè chief and custodian of Ọ̀rànmiyàn, variously as Ògún priest (11, 115, 116, 277) and as Ọ̀rànmiyàn priest/custodian (96, 127, 130, 289, 256) and thereby betrays his uneasiness with respect to the cult organisations of the *òrìṣà* devotees. Similarly, when for the first day of the festival in addition to Oṣògún (the chief priest of Ògún) he mentions the priests Qbadio, Qbawàrà, Qbàlòràn, and Erédùmí (116), he should have indicated

the functions of these priests – Qbadio is the chief priest of Odùduwà, Qbawàrà is an Elú chief worshipping Irò and Orò, Qbàlòràn is the head of a community worshipping Osé, and Erédùmí the chief priest of Ọ̀rànmiyàn – thus pointing to their role as representatives of their respective cult groups. In his brief account of the Qlójó festival, Bascom clearly states that the festival is considered to be celebrated in honour of both, Ògún and Ọ̀rànmiyàn, that Erédùmí is the priest of Ọ̀rànmiyàn and that Akogun is responsible for the worship of this deity (The Olojo Festival at Ife, 1937. In: A. Falassi [ed.], *Time out of Time. Essays on Festivals*. Albuquerque 1987: 64f.). Olúpòṇà oversees this article – which is one of the few dealing with a specific festival of Ilé-Ifè – and thus does not take advantage of an important source of information.

The Ìtápá festival, dedicated mainly to Qbàtálá (and Yemòó), is likewise described extensively (144–173). The author mentions his participation in the festival in 1997 and offers a number of details concerning, in particular, the impressive nightly ceremony in the grove outside the town. Though he distinguishes appropriately between the most important days and performances of the festival – which the previous description by Phillips Stevens fails to do (Orisha-nla Festival. *Nigeria Magazine* 90.1966: 184–199) – he erroneously attributes the key scene of throwing the palm wine – the only direct link with the Ifè myth of creation and the festival performances – to the Iṣùlè instead to the Ìpiwò day, and thus distorts the meaning of this ritual of prohibition with respect to the myth of creation (160). More importantly, he connects the Ìtápá festival, like the other festivals, to the worship of a single deity and does not realise that this celebration is performed by two major cult groups, those of Qbàtálá and Qbamerì, and several other minor groups. In fact, the Ìpiwò day offers a good example of the complexity of the festival and the interconnected activities of the two groups: While the Qbàtálá group propitiates its two deities, husband and wife, in its sacred grove, the Qbamerì group performs its own rituals in its own grove nearby. Ogungbe servants from the palace then bring the *iwò* sacrifice – formerly a human being – first for consecration to the Qbamerì grove and later for immolation to the Qbàtálá grove. Meanwhile the Qbamerì people move to the procession road of the Qbàtálá people, throw palm wine on the road in commemoration of Qbàtálá's failure to create the world due to his intoxication, and thus symbolically cut off their ritual enemies from the town. Olúpòṇà mentions these rituals and puts them into their religious perspective, but only insofar as the Qbàtálá group is concerned (162–169). A more important omission concerns the Ìmójùbì performances two days later, first behind the palace and then in the great reception hall in the palace itself, formerly in the presence of the king in Ilégbò (“house of the Ìgbò”, the inner palace). In connection with similar rituals attested for the well-documented thirteenth-century B.C. city of Ugarit in Syria, these ceremonies are particularly relevant for comparative purposes: they reveal the nature of Qbàtálá as a dying and rising god and thus strengthen the arguments in favour of Qbàtálá's identity as an early form of Yahweh, and they suggest parallels with the Israelite Festival

of Booths (Lange, *The Dying and Rising God in the New Year Festival of Ifẹ*. In: D. Lange, *Ancient Kingdoms*. Dettelbach 2004: 353 f., 369). Investigations into the Qbameri group – and other cult groups – and more attention paid to recently published works would have allowed the author to conceive of the festival as a joint celebration of more than one cult group, and to consider the palace and, in particular, the ancient Ilégbò as an integral part of the sacred space traced by the propitiatory activities of the *òrìṣà* devotees.

The most important festival of Ilé-Ifẹ from a comparative perspective is the Edì festival dedicated to Mọ̀rẹ̀mì, the Ifẹ heroine who went to the Ìgbò and discovered that these people attacked the Ifẹ by wearing masquerades (203–223). Olúpòṇà appropriately indicates that during the festival the Oluyare represent the Ìgbò, but he ignores that in their own perception the Oluyare are not enemies but friends of the Ifẹ and that in addition they are allies of the people of Qbameri and Odùduwà. Since earlier authors suggested that the female deity Mọ̀rẹ̀mì is none other than Miriam, the sister of Moses (J. A. Ademakinwa, *Ifẹ, Cradle of the Yoruba*. Lagos 1958/II: 4; S. Biobaku, *The Origin of the Yoruba*. Lagos 1955: 12 f.), an in-depth description of the festival with similar attention devoted to the activities of the other cult groups would have been expedient. In addition, scholars of comparative religious studies would certainly have appreciated a critical discussion of the correlations suggested earlier. Suffice to say here that, apart from the important topic of Yorùbá origins, attention to the current feminist approaches to the biblical Book of Exodus and to debates concerning the historicity of the Exodus account in the Hebrew Bible should have induced a scholar of religions to compare the prophetess Miriam as depicted by her song (Ex 15:20–21) with Mọ̀rẹ̀mì, the Ifẹ heroine. Build on solid scholarship, such comparison would certainly have attracted more attention to the traditional cults of Ilé-Ifẹ than considerations relating to the threatening encroachment of radical forms of Christianity.

Though Olúpòṇà points out the central role of the sacred king for the traditional civil religion of the town, he does not offer any detailed description of the palace organisation. He contents himself with mentioning that the Èmèsẹ or palace servants provide sacrifices for the different cult groups, but he omits any reference to the former organisation of the inner palace, the Ilégbò. Not distinguishing between the three different sections of the palace officials – Ọ̀mirin, Ọ́gun, and Ìlọ̀sin – and not differentiating between the corresponding three blocs of cult groups in the town, the author does not clarify the organisational structure of the town, although it was previously described by Bascom (1969: 30–38, 77–82) and others. His undifferentiated references to various categories of palace officials, participating in the performances of the cult dramas of the festivals, constitutes another serious handicap for understanding the precise relations between the king, the palace, and the cult groups of the town (129, 170; see Bascom 1969: 30–38, and Lange, *Preservation of the Canaanite Creation Culture in Ifẹ*. In: P. Probst and G. Spittler [eds.], *Between Resistance and Expansion. Dimensions of Local Vitality in Africa*. Münster 2004: 125–

155). A king who no longer respects the religious significance of the whole palace organisation is certainly even more at odds with his inherited role as the custodian of tradition than a king who – as depicted by the author – merely chooses by personal conviction to be a devout Christian.

Finally, some attention to the renewed debate on transcontinental relations would have been helpful for allowing the reader to look at Ilé-Ifẹ in a wider perspective. In reference to Leo Frobenius, Olúpòṇà briefly notes the outdated theories of migration from the Mediterranean world via the Atlantic Ocean, and rightly rejects them as a chimerical search for the “lost city of Atlantis.” Arguing in favour of local creativity, he dismisses theories of immigration for their denial of African inventiveness (14). Though one does not exclude the other, it is certainly an ill-founded argument to claim that historical research should stop at the point where it does not confirm what one would like history to have been. Moreover, theories of immigration do not deny indigenous creativity any more than Evangelical fervour can be stopped by pointing out its foreign nature. Quite to the contrary, Christian intolerance is more likely to be disarmed by the suggestion of common historical roots in both traditions than by the declaration of insurmountable differences between a supposedly strict indigenism of Ifẹ cults and the extraneousness of Christianity. In this respect, Olúpòṇà could have relied on a number of Yorùbá authors such as Samuel Johnson (*History of the Yorubas*. London 1921: 3–7, 148) and Saburi Biobaku (1955: 12 f.), who suggested that the Ọ̀yọ tradition of origin and parallel legends concerning Noah, the Flood, and Moses’s sister Miriam bear witness to common origins in the Near East. Moreover, apart from producing a tolerance-inspiring curiosity in the Christian intellectual *avant-garde* of Ilé-Ifẹ with respect to their own cultural heritage, an open and constructive discussion of this issue is also likely to promote – while there is still time – intensive investigation of all aspects of Ilé-Ifẹ’s traditional culture and its ancient civilisation.

To sum up Olúpòṇà provides a remarkable description of the traditional culture of Ilé-Ifẹ and makes a flamboyant plea for more tolerance and care for the town’s illustrious legacy. Though there are some shortcomings in the author’s perception of the cult groups, the festivals, and the palace organisation and his restrictive conceptions of Time and Space, his systematic survey of the city’s ancient religious heritage and his skilful usage of Yorùbá terminology and oral ritualistic texts make his book an appreciated addition to the few comprehensive accounts of the vanishing traditional culture of Ilé-Ifẹ.

Dierk Lange

Parsons, Ross: *Growing Up With HIV in Zimbabwe. One Day This Will All Be Over*. Woodbridge: James Currey, 2012. 197 pp. ISBN 978-1-84701-048-3. Price: £ 40.00

Parsons, a Zimbabwean child psychotherapist and anthropologist, has created an ethnographic description of children living with HIV while growing up in a small Zimbabwe town under conditions of extreme adversity.