African concentration camps were designed to protect their inhabitants by keeping them out of harm’s way, out of the line of fire, is difficult to sustain, although that seems to have been the motive of the missionaries who encouraged their converts to seek refuge in the German camps in South-West Africa. Jonas Kreienbaum faces up to questions such as these, as they are raised by the phenomenon of concentration camps. Quoting Horst Gründner, he asks, was colonization primarily “genocide, or forced modernization” (p. 3)? What defines or determines the roll-out of European colonization: mass violence, the civilizing mission, economic exploitation? Within this overall project, were the camps, given the high mortality rates, weapons of genocidal destruction? Protective civilian enclaves? Sites of upliftment and education? Pools of exploitable labour? In both southern African cases, it is possible to answer “yes” to all these questions. As Jonas Kreienbaum shows, motive and method could vary from camp to camp, from one superintendent to another.

The author is scrupulous in his marshalling of the evidence, which is important when one realises how widely the records of one camp may differ from another, how scantily some phases of the wars were recorded as opposed to others. *A Sad Fiasco* offers a clear account of the conduct of the two wars involved, showing that one perhaps important feature in common between the two systems was that both were initially implemented as counter-measures to guerrilla warfare, following on reverses in the field, or at least on a lack of success in ending the wars by other means, including para-genocidal tactics like Kitchener’s scorched earth policy and the German “brutal military action” (p. 89) in South-West Africa.

One feature that distinguishes the British from the German camps is that the former set up separate camps for “Boers” and “Africans,” and that some Boer prisoners of war were incarcerated in British colonies overseas. Despite the myth, this was never a “white man’s war.” The South-West African camps incarcerated Herero and Nama, but also some few Bergdamara and San. Over time survival rates improved, and as the wars turned in the colonizers’ favor, the camps perhaps became more like labor reserves or re-education centers. One feature that distinguished the South African War was the strength of the international support and sympathy for the Boer cause. This was a complex phenomenon, involving some tension between acknowledgement of and respect for ethnic identity, and global humanitarianism and its antipathy to claims to racial superiority.

Jonas Kreienbaum’s title is a quote from Sir Alfred Milner, British High Commissioner in South Africa, recognizing that high death rates in the camps were “not merely incidental” but inherent in the system: “The whole thing, I think now, has been a mistake” (p. 1). One way or another, their outcome was built into the colonial/imperial/capitalist system. This impressive book helps its readers to grasp more clearly a tragic phase of modern history.

Tony Voss, *Independent Scholar - Sydney*


This short monograph by Timothy Landry, an assistant professor of anthropology and religious studies at Trinity College, examines the globalization of Vodún in Ouidah, a coastal port town
in Bénin that has played a central role in the Atlantic world since the era of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Landry focuses specifically on the religious encounter between Western spiritual seekers and Béninois practitioners in recent decades. Over five chapters, Landry argues that the global expansion of Vodún has been facilitated by its ritual secrecy—an apparent paradox. Foreign spiritual tourists want to experience the “real” Vodún, and secrecy is how these foreigners authenticate their “experience, or a sacred object, space, person, and being” as legitimate (p. 164). It is necessary to point out that Landry does not approach the spiritual encounter as a dispassionate observer, but rather he is implicated in it. Landry previously trained as a priest in Haitian Vodou, and he apprenticed as a Vodún diviner himself as part of the research process. As a result, this is an insider-outsider account of Vodún in the tradition of anthropologists and historians including Paul Stoller, Judy Rosenthal, and Ivor Miller.

Landry’s monograph illustrates how foreign initiates integrate their cultural positions into African “religions,” in a kind of symmetrical process to how Africans have transformed Christianity for hundreds of years. Some of these innovations smack of cultural imperialism. Western spiritual seekers, for instance, have “whitened” African “religions” including Vodún and Ifá by avoiding difficult and challenging rituals such as animal sacrifice, head shaving, and praise poetry (pp. 145-146, 158). Other innovations, however, reflect the flexibility of Vodún itself. Westerners, for example, have adjusted ingredients in ceremonies to account for their unique environmental context. Jean, Landry’s divination teacher, for example, encouraged him to substitute leaves from trees found in Bénin for leaves from trees found in the United States in the construction of spirit shrines when he returned home (p. 146). Similarly, one American practitioner supplemented his practice of Vodún with independent knowledge of Lucumí whenever he encountered a Vodún ceremony that could not be replicated or an ingredient that could not be obtained in the United States (p. 145).

This book makes a variety of scholarly contributions. His analysis of the globalization of Vodún, for instance, raises questions about the utility of the term “ethnic, traditional, or indigenous religion” (p. 155), just as modern expressions of Christianity in Africa challenge the usefulness of the term “African indigenous/independent/initiated church.” Landry also makes an important contribution to the theoretical literature on religious conversion in Africa, which has assumed that processes of religious change always involve moving away from “indigenous religions” to world religions, such as Christianity and Islam. In addition, through his discussions of both a devout Catholic and an Evangelical priest embracing Vodún without abandoning their Christian identities (pp. 136-38, 142-44), Landry shows how new and old beliefs and identities frequently exist side by side, a situation of syncretism. In practice, conversion is rarely (if ever) “a clear case of replacing one set of beliefs with another” (p. 131), as some scholars have contended.

The monograph showcases both the benefits and the risks that accompany Landry’s apprenticeship methods. His apprenticeship as Vodún diviner not only allowed him to participate in Vodún ceremonies and festivals, but it also allowed him to engage in ritual dances, singing, and sacrifices that non-initiates would never have been allowed to observe and experience. Landry also notes that his initiation into Vodún as a diviner permitted him to reflect on his own belief system and interrogate the nature of belief in ways that are not possible using traditional historical and sociological methods (p. 149). At the same time, however, he does

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[http://www.africa.ufl.edu/asq/pdfs/v19i3-4a9.pdf](http://www.africa.ufl.edu/asq/pdfs/v19i3-4a9.pdf)
point out that his position as a diviner within Béninois society as opposed to simply a “curious anthropologist” hindered his ability to ask questions about witchcraft (p. 107). Since Landry had been initiated as a diviner, Béninois frequently misinterpreted his innocent questions about witchcraft as a request to be initiated as a witch. While it is clear from a reading of this book that religious apprenticeship has some serious advantages for anthropologists of religion, future apprentices should try to be aware of the ways in which the apprenticeship method can affect the trajectory of their research.

Unlike the majority of scholarly monographs, Landry’s book is a delightful read, for it is essentially a memoir of Landry’s eighteen months in Ouidah that is peppered with rigorous empirical and theoretical insights. Landry is always present in the narrative, and the reader can feel, for example, Landry’s nervousness as he prepares for his initiation (pp. 70-82), his hesitation to sacrifice a goat (p. 54), his fears about being initiated into Egúngún (p. 84), and his amazement when a chicken is protected from a gunshot by a charm (p. 110). Landry has a wonderful eye for small but significant details. He recalls, for instance, that a “large blue plastic container” used during his initiation was marked with the words “Made in China” (p. 74; see also p. 142), subtly highlighting how Vodún has become implicated in processes of globalization. Ultimately, this book is more than an ethnography of an African religious tradition, it is a thoughtful personal reflection on the ethnographic process that would make a nice addition to syllabi on research methods. In my final reflection, Vodún: Secrecy and the Search for Divine Power is a worthy recipient of the Society for the Anthropology of Religion’s 2019 Clifford Geertz Prize in the Anthropology of Religion.

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It is encouraging to see such a comprehensive contribution on urban Ethiopia at a time when many studies in Ethiopia have been giving more emphasis on rural communities. While the direction of the rate of urban development in today’s Ethiopia is profoundly visible, little is known about the dimensions of the development, particularly technologies of development. This study by Mains should be accepted with gratitude, and welcomed as a huge contribution to Ethiopian studies of urban development. The book presents interesting research findings that several years of field work experience have yielded. It documents the complex interplay between construction and destruction, through questioning the legitimacy of the state and the struggles of labor in construction technologies, and further illustrates how affective politics shaped development in Ethiopian urban settings. It explores interplays at the intersections between the state, construction, and governance in urban Ethiopian. And of course, labor was also an integral part of this contribution.

The book adds fresh insights into issues of construction development in urban centers through making comparisons between two cities situated in southern and southwestern Ethiopia—Hawassa and Jimma. Its attempt on construction development transcends explaining technologies of development and emphasizes that “the complex relationship between