

between the main transport union, the GPRTU (Ghana Private Road Transport Union, which Hart reports as being the largest union, representing about 85 per cent of Ghana's drivers), and the ruling PNDC party could not shield commercial drivers from the deregulation and privatization required by World Bank/IMF policy. Indeed, Hart suggests that commercial driving degenerated into a tool for survival in the 1980s, and became an occupation of refuge and last resort, not a path to prosperity. Hart further suggests that this trajectory continues to this day due to persistently high rates of unemployment and limited access to education. Yet Hart may be overstating her argument: certainly, for many of the boys and young men I have interviewed in research focusing on mobility over the last two decades in Ghana, including in urban areas, commercial driving is still seen as a very desirable occupation. There are some occupations of last resort in the West African transport sector for both genders, but these are most commonly centred around head-porterage, on-loading and off-loading of vehicles, and (for males only) the manual operation of push-trucks and handcarts in market areas. From the standpoint of many young men in poor communities, where employment prospects are so limited, driving is still perceived as far preferable to the alternatives.

The book draws on substantial archival research, some telling photographs, and an impressive set of in-depth interviews, especially with older men from Accra and Kumasi who are able to reflect on their driving experiences over many decades. Historical and anthropological literature is referenced extensively, although I was surprised to find no reference to Grieco *et al.*'s 1996 study of transport, travel and trade in Accra, which has much detail regarding women's experiences of informal public transport and thus provides some complementary perspectives. Transport rarely sits at the centre of texts about sub-Saharan Africa in the twenty-first century, despite its crucial place in the past and future of the continent. There is much here for readers across a wide range of disciplines to learn and enjoy.

Gina Porter

Durham University

[r.e.porter@durham.ac.uk](mailto:r.e.porter@durham.ac.uk)

doi:10.1017/S0001972018000608

Filip De Boeck and Sammy Baloji, *Suturing the City: living together in Congo's urban worlds*. London: Autograph ABP (hb £30 – 978 1 899282 19 7). 2016, 328 pp.

This brilliant collaboration between an anthropologist and a photographer has resulted in not only a handsome volume that does justice to word and image alike, but also something far more important – a beautifully successful balance between thoughtful ethnography, thought-provoking and appropriate theory, and a visual essay that sensitively and imaginatively investigates its themes rather than just illustrating them.

'What this book aims to capture and understand,' writes De Boeck, 'is how urban residents ... read potential, promise and prospect into the blackness of the hole: how they throw themselves – their words and their own bodies – into this daily struggle with the city's madness.' The suturing or stitching together of the gaps and holes, both infrastructural and more figurative, in a city such as Kinshasa involves a shifting set of social strategies and new forms of collective life, if residents are to successfully navigate living together in such urban environments. The 'urban acupuncture' that the authors undertake throughout the book

is a contradictory exercise in some ways. Seeking to puncture the surface level of city life to understand its temporal dynamic would appear to run counter to the authors' ambition for this to be a mostly horizontal book, investigating the surface layer of a city. Yet, they argue, the vertical is always there in the interplay between the historical layers of the urban landscape. While Baloji's photography engages with urban, especially street, life with empathy and acuity, it is the interplay between these temporal layers that gives both the ethnography and the imagery its force, for instance in images such as the one of a set of concrete steps from some abandoned building project (p. 22) that seems to lead nowhere, traders gathered around its base or sitting in its shade. The city has holes, but they do not sink through a single surface; instead, many historical surfaces, congealed forms of social and political activity over time, gather in places and in nodes within the city, and it is here that Baloji and De Boeck find themselves inexorably drawn, as well as towards two other forms representing the vertical orientation – the mountain and the hole – which structure the chapters of the book.

*Suturing the City* is a hybrid object whose production is worth reflecting upon. On the one hand, it is an art book, published by the Arts Council-supported Autograph ABP in London, which had earlier exhibited some of Baloji's photographs. The Imane Farès Gallery in Paris, which represents Baloji, also contributed financially to what was no doubt an expensive volume to produce. Further support was received from the Wiels contemporary arts centre in Brussels, which exhibited De Boeck and Baloji's *Urban Now: city life in Congo* in 2016, which subsequently toured to Portugal and Canada. Yet it is also an academic monograph; the text by De Boeck is by turns theoretical, autobiographical, historical, reflective and poetic. The anthropologist needed to remove himself from departmental life for a two-month writing retreat in Lisbon to shape most of the book, a decision that also seems to have led to a neighbour offering to help edit the emerging manuscript. Research funding from the University of Leuven under the umbrella of a larger project on satellite cities in Africa appears to have enabled joint research visits by the authors to Kinshasa and Lubumbashi, ending in 2015. And then there is the contribution of Congolese people to the research, a Congolese professor, a long-term assistant and their family members. Ordinarily, disciplinary and commercial forces act to keep these distinct areas of activity separate; the art gallery will occasionally bring in academics to write forewords, give commentaries, and chair discussions at openings. And the academic journal or book will occasionally critique the work of practitioners such as Baloji, and the historical and visual contexts within which they perceive they are embedded. Collaborations between anthropologists and visual artists are, of course, not unheard of, and there are some good examples around, but I do not know of one as successful as this in book form. Partly this success is due to the multiple agency support outlined above, but when you dig down into the book you realize that it transpired only as a result of a shared research agenda, a joint investigation that emerged from the field and that was shaped there, in collaboration with the community and their urban environment. The interplay between Baloji's visual enquiry and De Boeck's ethnographic description is intensely satisfying and enriching, and also does something else very important – far from characterizing those struggling to live in Congo's cities as victims on the fringes of modernity, the photographs allow people's dignity and creativity to shine through in a way that anthropology is sometimes ill equipped to do.

Christopher Morton  
University of Oxford  
[christopher.morton@prm.ox.ac.uk](mailto:christopher.morton@prm.ox.ac.uk)  
doi:10.1017/S000197201800061X