

of the book, it looks more likely that they relied on the patronage argument summarized above. Chan and Gallagher actually concede its importance in noting that ‘the incentive for an aspirational voter was to join ZANU-PF and benefit from an indigenisation brought from the countryside to the cities’ (p. 36). If Zimbabweans were motivated to vote for ZANU-PF and Mugabe because of the ‘goodies’ they stood to gain, we might not need a complex narrative about which figure seemed more presidential.

These quibbles notwithstanding, *Why Mugabe Won* is a worthy read. It rightly questions simple ‘rigging’ explanations and offers a broad range of factors behind Mugabe’s 2013 electoral success. Chan and Gallagher have produced a thought-provoking addition to the growing scholarship on the 2013 elections. *Why Mugabe Won* will also be of particular interest after Mugabe’s removal. In fact, the book seems to anticipate this fate in suggesting that ‘the 2013 elections were won by Robert Mugabe and ZANU-PF, but they were also elections that led to everything he and his party once stood for facing a total eclipse by the time of the next elections in 2018’ (p. 178).

Ngonidzashe Munemo

Williams College

[Ngonidzashe.Munemo@williams.edu](mailto:Ngonidzashe.Munemo@williams.edu)

doi:10.1017/S0001972018000281

Michaela Pelican, *Masks and Staffs: identity politics in the Cameroon Grassfields*.

New York NY and Oxford: Berghahn Books (hb US\$120/£85 – 978 1 78238 728 2; pb US\$34.95/£24 – 978 1 78533 514 3). 2015, 260 pp.

Pelican’s book is a fascinating descent into the dazzling complexities that ethnicity can take on even within a small area, and provides original and helpful tools for making sense of these complexities. It opens and closes with threatening events. In Chapter 1, Grassfielders stage a furious protest against Mbororo immigrants when they refuse to respect certain rituals at the investiture of the local chief. It closes (in Chapter 7) with the murder of Mr X, a local who would have been beheaded by the henchmen of a rich Mbororo notable. Yet the main theme of the book is reconciliation. And, indeed, in both episodes the violent potential does not explode. Rather, conflicts are effectively contained, at least to a certain degree.

The book focuses on Misaje, a small town on the northern fringes of the Cameroon Grassfields, an area that became famous for enchanting British colonialists. Situated close to the border of Nigeria, it was in this district that Mbororo pastoralists first entered the Grassfields (probably just after 1900), and they are still strongly present today (about 25 per cent of the district’s population as against 5 to 10 per cent for the Grassfields as a whole). In addition to the Grassfielders/Mbororo distinction (on which much has already been published since Phyllis Kaberry’s 1952 book), Pelican introduces another ethnic group, the Hausa, who over time developed a very different version of affirming its identity as an ethnic group.

Chapters 2 and 3 offer a compelling sketch of the different ethnicities of the Nchaney (Grassfielders) and the Mbororo by examining the historicity of each identification. Not only is the historical consciousness of both groups marked by different ‘modalities’ – Nchaney history focusing on the settlement around the *fon* (chief) while Mbororo history is about movement and cohabitation with other groups – but the modalities of each group have also shifted over time. Thus, the usual distinction between Grassfielders as agriculturalists and Mbororo as pastoralists no longer holds, since most Mbororo have become

settled as agro-pastoralists of some sort. This trend gives land conflicts a new tenor. Yet, Pelican also shows that colonial stereotypes about the groups (farmers against cattle-keepers) have been absorbed into popular discourse, with people still tending to explain present-day conflicts by means of this old distinction. Yet, the antagonistic potential of these stereotypes is defused by practical arrangements time and again.

Chapters 5 and 6 complicate this ethnic puzzle by dwelling on the different modalities of ethnic identification within the Hausa group. Originally a conglomerate of immigrating merchants, the group continues to grow through the inclusion of increasing numbers of converts to Islam, notably Nchaney and Bessa women, eager to marry Muslim husbands. For the Hausa, history is about religion and conversion, rather than about an exclusive ethnicity. Of the three different ethnicities, the Hausa is no doubt the most inclusive, facilitating cohabitation with other groups.

After an introduction – juxtaposing so many views on ethnicity that there is the danger of overkill – the book's original theoretical contribution emerges gradually from detailed ethnography in subsequent chapters. The author shows how time and again people succeed in containing conflicts through new strategies in a context of globalization. In her last chapter (p. 184), Pelican signals, for instance, a gradual change in strategies between the 1990s (as evident in the conflict over the investiture of a new chief; see Chapter 1) and post-2000 (as evident in the case of the beheaded Grassfielder; see Chapter 7). One influence has been the growth in NGOs within the area (as elsewhere in the continent). However, the author signals that the practical impact of their newly introduced strategies can be highly ambivalent – for instance, one NGO uses theatre as a way of helping people to deal with farmer–herder tensions, yet in practice this strategy seems to reinforce simplistic stereotypes about the opposing interests of the two groups.

An additional external factor with a similarly ambiguous impact is the practice of conferring UN recognition on 'indigenous' groups. Pelican shows how MBOSCUA, an association created by Mbororo youngsters, makes use of this recognition with great success. Yet the practice has led to considerable confusion, as the word 'indigenous' seems to be locally understood as a translation of the colonial term 'native', which was generally applied to Grassfields groups who had a long history of settlement in the area, and not to pastoralists who had come later. Pelican has already published extensively on the impact this international recognition has had at the local level, and so this book does not dwell on this fascinating development, using it only as an example of the historical contingency of ethnicity's developments. Her general conclusion is that it is impossible to predict how different modalities of ethnic identification in the area will develop. The broader context keeps shifting, as local actors make use of new opportunities.

Yet, I wonder whether her last phrase – that the complexity of ethnic conflict 'defies generalization' – does full justice to the merits of her own book. She certainly shows how wider historical factors have affected local identifications in ways that are hard to foresee. But her analysis also highlights key factors that help make sense of this apparent jumble of historical contingency. Of particular interest might be the insight that within all cases of ethnic tension in the area, both colonial and postcolonial, the state looms as the main 'other' against whom popular anger is directed, and not other ethnic groups. Such observations make this book an inspiring example of how detailed ethnography can engender theoretical insights of a wider purport.

*Peter Geschiere*

University of Amsterdam

[P.L.Geschiere@uva.nl](mailto:P.L.Geschiere@uva.nl)

doi:10.1017/S0001972018000293