

BOOK REVIEW

Andrea Mariko Grant and Yolana Pringle, eds. *Anxiety in and about Africa: Multidisciplinary Perspectives and Approaches*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2020. 244 pp. Index. \$44.95. Paper. ISBN: 978-0821424360.

What does it mean to have anxiety, or for something or someone to be anxious? As editors of *Anxiety in and about Africa: Multidisciplinary Perspectives and Approaches*, Andrea Mariko Grant and Yolana Pringle posit that answering this question is no easy feat, arguing that anxiety is diffuse, diverse, and ultimately only able to be understood in specific contexts. “We do not attempt to draw clear distinctions between anxiety and related emotions or emotional states” (16) they state, lest they impose it on “contexts in which the term itself has no direct equivalent in language,” or risk “dehistoricizing or depoliticizing emotion words in ways that end up limiting their analytical potential” (16). As such, anxiety becomes the individual conceptual ground of each contributor to this edited volume of eight essays. Most of the chapters focus on spaces in East Africa (the exceptions being chapters on South Africa and Senegal), and most are written by historians (with one by an archaeologist and one by an anthropologist). They cover temporalities from the mid-nineteenth century to the contemporary, attaching anxiety to a wide range of political, social, cultural, and corporeal contexts.

The book is divided into three parts. The chapters in Part One draw significantly on historiography of colonial anxieties, emphasizing European constructions of Africa and Africans as threatening, unpredictable, and ultimately dangerous to European bodies and institutions. Rachel King explores the archaeological traces of banditry in nineteenth century South Africa, arguing that anxiety “relates to the ways in which perceptions of people, things, spaces, sensuousness, memory, and desire are bundled together” (57). Cécile Feza Bushidi’s chapter examines the capacity for African dance rituals to both enervate and soothe Europeans in colonial Kenya, establishing a complexity of co-existing emotional states and responses within colonial spaces. Kalala Ngalamulume’s chapter on yellow fever epidemics in colonial Senegal highlights the anxiety that attended both the threat of disease and the effects of epidemic prevention and containment.

© The Author(s), 2023. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of the African Studies Association.

The chapters in Part Two use anxiety as a tool for reconceptualizing the scale of historical narratives, often emphasizing the individual effects of large-scale political transformations. Nakanyike B. Musisi articulates the political and social anxiety surrounding gender and sexuality in the court of Buganda king Mwanga II, as Christian missionaries exerted ever more pressure to impose their own codes of morality. Will Jackson and Harry Firth-Jones analyze white settlers' applications for repatriation from Kenya to the UK in the late 1950s and early 1960s, citing fears for their safety, uncertainty over their futures in independent Kenya, and the psychological distress caused by their circumstances. Andrea Mariko Grant recounts the growing mental and physical effects of anxiety on a Rwandan pastor who has been targeted as a subversive agent by the RPF government in recent years.

Part Three contains two chapters which examine anxiety in relation to expectations of the present and future. Simon Turner's chapter, based on interviews with Burundian refugees in Kigali, argues that the uncertainty of their situation has the capacity to elicit both hope and anxiety. However, as multiple future possibilities have become foreclosed over the years, what was once hope is increasingly turning into despair. Jonathan L. Earle inverts the emergent paradigm, arguing that narratives of anxiety in post-colonial Buganda have been normalized, but alongside other narratives of calm and stability associated with the Bugandan kingdom in relation to a tumultuous Ugandan state.

The chapters are all evocatively written and will no doubt be valuable to scholars who study their specific times, places, and subjects. The relationship to a discourse on anxiety is more uneven, however. Several of the chapters tend to treat anxiety (or its adjectival form "anxious") largely as a synonym for other, more specific terms such as fear, instability, social tension, or political crisis. Some chapters adopt the idea of anxiety as "fear without an object" as a way to invoke a relationship to uncertainty or futurity, but this often comes across as a distinction without a difference. In the best usages, some of the chapters are able to provide meaningful analysis by putting anxiety into conversation with other emotional or affective states, complicating what otherwise feels like a totalizing effort to ferret out anxiety as a defining feature of everything, everywhere, all the time.

One thing the chapters of this volume never do is treat anxiety as a disease state or medical diagnosis. On the one hand, this is a refreshing and important effort to depathologize anxiety, to grapple with its normative properties, even its potentially productive ones. On the other hand, it also muddles the etiologies and epistemologies behind anxiety, leaving it as an omnipresent force with indeterminate causes and indefinable effects. It is simply there. It is therefore unclear what the culminating message of the volume is meant to be. What value is added to our understanding of these various contexts by identifying them as "anxious," as opposed to uncertain, unstable, or precarious? If anxiety is such an adaptable framework, how should we understand it as a category of analysis? If its applications are so nebulous, what does it actually encompass, and, perhaps more importantly,

what does it not? Ultimately, this volume is perhaps most valuable for the ways it suggests questions that destabilize notions of what anxiety is and what it is good for as a descriptive or analytical term. In other words, it does an excellent job of conveying anxiety about anxiety.

Matthew M. Heaton 
Virginia Tech University
Blacksburg, Virginia, USA
mheaton@vt.edu

doi:10.1017/asr.2023.47