

Martine Guichard, Tilo Grätz, and Youssouf Diallo (eds) (2014), *Friendship, Descent and Alliance in Africa: Anthropological Perspectives*, Oxford: Berghahn, ISBN 9781782382867, 220 pp.

The magic of friendship as an affective, supportive, and often central relationship in many people's lives has received much attention from philosophers and authors since the beginning of the nineteenth century. Friendship enriches people's lives with joy and support as much as it can cause disappointment and pain. Friendships are affective, personal, and instrumental, as well as being sites of power and domination, as Martine Guichard points out in the introduction of the volume at hand. Even though these relationships can be considered most central to social organisation, friendships began to receive attention in the social sciences only recently.

The volume is divided into three main sections, each exploring ethnographic perspectives on friendship from different angles: the first section considers the relation between friendship, kinship, and age; the second explores friendship and its potential for cross-cutting ethnic boundaries; and the third section examines friendship in urban settings as well as its relation to politics. Thereby, the proximity of relations that are dyadic to relations that are guided by the principle of descent and alliance are stressed; these have generated a rich research tradition in Africanist scholarship. Many authors point to the often neglected institutional forms of friendship known in many groups living on the African continent, such as institutionalised peer loyalty among Maasai (Paul Spencer; Chapter 2), interethnic bonds among Hor in Ethiopia (Tadesse and Guichard; Chapter 3), friendship and spiritual parenthood between Mosse and Fulbe (Mark Breusers; Chapter 4), and patterns of friendship among Tuareg in Mali (Georg Klute; Chapter 8). By doing so, the volume highlights the centrality of friendship for social organisation in many societies and shows that friends are important sources of material, emotional, and spiritual support – some friendships even being of political relevance. Friendships often exist against the backdrop of kin relations and kin rules, sometimes cross-cutting kinship ties as well as inter-ethnic boundaries.

Especially in urban contexts and in the context of labour migration in Africa's highly mobile societies, friends are decisive for people's social and spatial mobility. This is best demonstrated in Tilo Grätz's study on friendship among young mine workers in Benin (West Africa), where it is viewed as "a relationship of relative durability, mutual appreciation, comprising shared moral standards, expectations of reciprocity and trust,

sustained by mutual affection, equity, support, and common ideas of equality” (101). Friends are important for migrating youths’ access to shelter, land, relations to money lenders, as well as trading relations. These relations most often entail trust in business and can therefore be regarded as most decisive for young miners’ economic and social survival in a highly risky and unstable economic environment. They entail hierarchical relations between younger and older miners which regulate access to work space as well as rights to (bigger) shares of the household income and common property. Some of these friendships are modelled after other, historically well-established forms of relationships. For instance, sometimes relations between landlords and those renting resemble patron–client relations in that region and entail similar responsibilities and obligations between socially unequal persons. These long-established models of relating are flexibly re-interpreted by participants and may be feeding into networking on larger scales (111).

The flexibility of friendships may also become a great political resource, as is the case with Botswana’s first-generation elites. These friendships are entertained outside of kin networks and across ethnic boundaries; they provide politicians with access to economic opportunities and are instrumental for political decision-making (Richard Werbner). Georg Klute discusses the rise and fall of the social significance of the notion of friendship in Tuareg rebellious movements during the upheaval in Mali from 1990 to 1996. As bonds began to form around trust, emotional affinity, and familiarity, friendship gained importance among Tuareg people in exile in Algeria and Libya in the 1990s. In exile, people were identified by others, and in consequence identified each other, as members of ethnic groups with common traits rather than through their tribal belonging. Based on this experience, the rhetoric of friendship provided a political imaginary and utopia which fostered the mobilisation of Tuareg people within a nationalist movement. However, once the exiles returned to their countries of origin, Mali and Niger, and were confronted with the violent attacks of repressive nation-states, the movement fractured: in a context of insecurity, people tended to turn to established networks of kin in cases of emergency.

These studies show how the adaptability of friendship as an institution may foster its social significance. They emphasise the importance of friendship for understanding the social distribution of power, as is well argued in an afterword by Steve Reyna. People can powerfully use affective bonds in order to establish and mobilise relations of power as well as material resources.

The volume captures the complex nature of friendship among various ethnic groups in Africa in different social contexts and situations. On the basis of rich ethnography, the volume manages to offer a comparative perspective on an often neglected form of relationship and proves that the study of friendship sheds light on important societal issues – such as the distribution of property, social support, the regulation of hierarchy and power, and social mobility – as well as yielding insights into the question of how political alliances nest into other networks, such as kinship or ethnic alliances. The studies provide evidence of the different shapes of social cohesion that can become articulated through friendship with various “binding forces,” as Günther Schlee puts it in his foreword. The edited volume contributes not only to the establishment of the study of a neglected field in anthropology but also to one of the core questions in social theory.

- Astrid Bochow