African Studies Quarterly

Volume 17, Issue 3

November 2017

Published by the Center for African Studies, University of Florida

ISSN: 2152-2448

Video Film Industry which interest lies in the diasporic influence of Nollywood and the controversy therefrom.

First, Haynes identifies the initial genres; money ritual films, senior girls' films and the triad of family, love and community films espousing the interplay between African cultural practices and the doctrinal dynamics of Pentecostal Christianity. Fundamental factors that coalesced to birth Nollywood are recounted and analysed: the 1992 crisis between the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) and trained professionals working behind and in front of the camera, a ready-made basis provided by Nigeria's Yoruba travelling theatre tradition, the astronomical increase in the cost of production of celluloid films owing mainly to the devaluation of the naira, and the public's loss of interest in stage plays. Haynes examines the ground-breaking efforts of pacesetters like Kenneth Nnebue, Amaka Igwe, and Tunde Kelani which later burgeoned into a magnificent video film industry. Kelani's "Other Nollywood" stands out, Haynes observes, because of technical superiority which paved way for its entry into international film festivals.

In part two, Haynes dwells on the cultural epic genre bemoaning its lack of representational accuracy of the Igbo cultural heritage partly because it occludes republicanism, an innate feature of the Igbo people. Haynes hails Kelani's "Other Nollywood" as a worthy example because of its veritable documentation of Yoruba cultural heritage. Other genres which Haynes names in this part are *'igwe'*-centric or royal films, village films, crime films, and a resurgence of the ritual film genre not for 'get-rich-quick' purposes as in part one, but for power and politics.

Haynes caps off the final part with two other genres; the diaspora films and campus films. Haynes notes the near-complete absence of both the supernatural and Pentecostal Christianity structures in diaspora films and a heavy dose of cult-related thematic concerns in campus films. To Haynes, Nollywood oscillates between a heroic assertion of Nigerian culture against a flood of imports and a commercially-driven betrayal of Nigerian culture, participating as it does with mixed motives in Nigeria's contemporary realities. That the practitioners adopted "Nollywood" coined by New York Times reporter, Norimitsu Onishi, perhaps attests to this ambivalent disposition.

Futuristically, Haynes sees an economically vibrant "New Nollywood" predicated partly on the recent establishment of multiplex cinemas in a few cities in Nigeria. This is, however, dubious given the prevailing precarious state of the country's economy. Although lacking in ideological stance, Haynes howbeit lauds Nollywood's veritable seismographic recording of the Nigerian temperament.

Oluchi J. Igili, *Adekunle Ajasin University, Nigeria*

Steve Howard. 2016. *Modern Muslims: A Sudan Memoir.* Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press. 217 pp.

Steve Howard is a rare breed of scholar who lived among the people he wrote about in the Sudan. The Republican Brotherhood, led by the late Mahmoud Mohamed Taha, who was a small but fearless intellectual, was a modern Sufi movement that attempted to

restore what it considered the truly peaceful and egalitarian Islam. The author notes that the attempted reformation of this movement was thwarted when their leader was executed for alleged apostasy at the age of seventy-six. He was hanged by the Sudanese regime led by dictator Gaafar Nimeiry in 1985. The Sudanese people rose up against Nimeiry and deposed him four months later; Taha's execution is thought to have contributed to the popular uprising that overthrew the military strongman.

The established political and religious elites considered Taha a threat to their monopoly on the interpretation of Islam and politics, the author elaborates. It could be argued that Taha's "Second Message of Islam" resembles Martin Luther's 95 theses. Both caused an uproar and indignation among the established religious leaders and heresy charges were labeled against both reformers. While Luther lived long enough to see the fruits of his reformation, Taha, a trained engineer, was executed before his movement could accomplish its goal of reforming Islam.

The author, a former Peace Corps volunteer in the neighboring Chad, was received with a typical Sudanese hospitality better illustrated by the Arabic proverb "when a guest comes to a host, the host becomes the guest and the guest the host." The movement advocated for a version of Islam that is peaceful, egalitarian and gender inclusive. Taha is fondly referred to in the book as *Ustadh*, an endearing term in Arabic that means a teacher. This honorific title is only given to religious teachers known for their learning. In Sufism, the term is also applied to the guide of a *tariqah*, a religious movement.

The Sudanese proverb "do not keep your stick away from these three: a woman, a drum and a female donkey" indicates the discrimination women face in their country. Taha elevated the position of women in his movement as equal to men. The author makes clear that women played a significant leadership role in the Republican Brotherhood. While the term "brotherhood" may seem to exclude sisters from the movement, nothing could be further from reality. All genders were equal members of the brotherhood. The author notes in his book, especially in the chapter "A Women's Movement" that the Republican Brotherhood had a soft spot for women's issues and considered them as an integral part of the movement contrary to the prevailing Sudanese culture. This new thought of emancipating women challenged an entire worldview that considered half the population as inferior to men.

Howard shows, throughout the book, a particular knowledge of the Republican Brotherhood, and a general understanding of the people of Sudan. Many of the findings of the author can apply to the rest of Muslims in sub-Sahara Africa where different versions of Sufism enjoy a huge following. This book is not an academic work and never confines the Republican Brotherhood into a scholarly box. This is a living book that reads like a thriller, and it contains a treasure trove about the movement, their leader, vision, mission, and theology.

The intrepid author demonstrates an insider's knowledge of the movement that accepted him as a respected member, but he presents his findings with integrity and clarity. His cultural knowledge and linguistic ability reflect his thirty years of studying and admiring the Republican Brotherhood. The book is courteous of the movement, but

it does not idolize it. This book bears witness to the fact that Islam is not a monolithic religion. The violent version of Islam familiar to many Westerners is the exception rather than the rule. The overwhelming majority of Muslims do not wield any sword to conquer a territory or impose their faith on anyone; they simply live their lives. This book is a must read for students and educators; it is also helpful to political leaders and their constituents.

Aweis Ali, *Africa Nazarene University, Nairobi*

Alison Jolly. 2016. *Thank You, Madagascar: The Conservation Diaries of Alison Jolly*. London: Zed Books. 391 pp.

Alison Jolly has left an engaging legacy for others to read. The book is not an autobiography, although she does speak from her own point of view on aging :"I am getting not only so old but so heavy that I am positively embarrassed when young men have to hoist me upwards with shoves on the bottom" (p. 246) and even death: "Somehow dying doesn't worry me at all. At least not yet. I've had lots of fun and excitement in life" (p. 361). The book is not a field journal with mind-numbing details of particular scientifically-collared lemurs on dark nights, but she informs the reader on many aspects of lemur and Malagasy society. The book is a treatise on conservation in Madagascar and a call for readers to join the effort of saving the natural world because "people of vision do change the course of history" (p. 78).

The book's setting could not be mistaken for anywhere else in the world. Jolly captures Madagascar's uniqueness beautifully: "Little by little the clouds lifted until the rainforest rose above Ranomafana town, bathed in sun. Sun here has a peculiarly golden tone, like sunset at noon. The folds of the hills were deep and green and black, covered in trees like tufted velvet" (p. 199). Jolly uses local words, but always explains the meaning. Readers learn them "*mora-mora* – slowly, slowly" (p. 329) with little effort. She explains why Malagasy surnames seem so long, why girls remain in school longer than boys, and many other questions about the island life that creep up, but would remain unanswered during a once-in-a-lifetime tourist visit.

The book is divided into five parts. Parts, and chapters within, them begin with a reflection drawn from Jolly's fifty-year engagement with the island. These include the voices of many of the Malagasy she has worked alongside and respects greatly. The diary entries, ranging from 1963- 2014, follow. Most are taken from entries at the time of four major conservation conferences in which Jolly participated. Part 1, "Villages," reveals the basis for the need. Jolly quotes Esther Boserup as saying, "It is hungry, or desperate or ambitious people who change their world" (p. 17). No doubt remains that a problem must be addressed. Part 2, "Politics," relates the coming together of global stakeholders with locals to form a National Environmental Action Plan. "Our cash killed Bedo" (pp. 121-24) is a sobering morality tale to be heeded by eco-tourists about learning from locals, or long-term residents, what is appropriate and what is not. Part 3, "Environment and development," describes the work of convincing Malagasy people who believed in their cultural heritage and practices that things must change. Stories of