

political centralization, the history of multi-ethnic urbanization prior to colonial rule, and the cross-cultural dynamics that shaped the operation of European trade in Africa.

Particularly impressive is the author's use of a wide range of archival sources in a multiplicity of languages (French, German, English, Danish, Dutch) and her command of the historical literature about the polities (Ouidah, Anlo, Asante, Akwamu, Dahomey) with which the communities she studies interacted. She begins her book with a discussion of the regional setting, and then examines, in chronological order in subsequent chapters: Little Popo and the rise of Afro-European trade, c.1600 to 1702; the era of the warrior kings, 1702–72; the era of the traders, 1772–1807; political disintegration and reconstitution, from the 1820s to the 1870s; and, in her final substantive chapter, the transition from slaves to palm oil, c.1807 to the 1870s. In her conclusions, she examines the impact of colonial partition on her area of study and its consequences for the peoples in these communities.

This is an outstanding study that fits very nicely with and helps complete our understanding of the history of European–African interactions on the coast of West Africa during the era of the Atlantic slave trade.

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TSITSI ELLA JAJI, *Africa in Stereo: modernism, music, and pan-African solidarity*.

New York NY: Oxford University Press (hb \$105–978 0 19 993637 3; pb \$31.95–978 0 19 993639 7). 2014, xi + 272 pp.

An updated expansion of her doctoral thesis in comparative literature from Cornell University, *Africa in Stereo* is the first monograph published by Tsitsi Ella Jaji. As a professor of English at the University of Pennsylvania, a poet and musician, she draws liberally on her various vocations and forms of expertise to examine African and Afro-diasporic critical – and primarily sonic – engagements with modernism in the twentieth century. Jaji's text outlines how collaborative music practices in the diaspora have inspired African writers and artists seeking to articulate their own, self-determining visions of present and future life in response to legacies of slavery and colonialism: 'Neither peripheral nor alternative, the forms of modernism ... are collaboratively worked out among black subjects on the African continent and abroad, subjects who share interrelated legacies of exclusion from the supposed *ur*-modernity of the West, as well as virtuosic repertoires of (re)-invented traditions that mark their modernist cultural productions ... *Africa in Stereo* offers a new term, stereomodernism, as a useful heuristic for analyzing texts and cultural practices that are both political and expressive, activated by black music and operative within the logic of pan-African solidarity' (p. 14).

Jaji suggests that, for people of the trans-Atlantic African diaspora, advancing political causes can sometimes be accomplished more efficaciously through music and its deceptive *jouissance* than through other, more normative channels. It is this potential on which the artists and writers – primarily from Western and South Africa – Jaji discusses 'have viewed artistic excellence on a global stage as a crucial tactic to demand the end of their modern subjection and the recognition of their modern subjectivity with all of its inherent human rights' (p. 14). Jaji adopts this perspective for the purposes of identifying and amplifying a sonic

politics of solidarity, activating pan-Africanist approaches to positive political and social change that, rather than masking difference behind tactics of strategic essentialism, instead highlight and celebrate those differences, responding 'in joyful creativity' (p. 9).

Amid this discussion of collaborative and dialogic aesthetic politics, Jaji emphasizes the importance of listening. In fact, many of the texts and performances Jaji studies begin with the act of listening and are realized through the reactive and empathetic agency of diasporic solidarity: 'These media forms are as much technologies of solidarity as the music itself. Through them, the essential work of listening brings affiliation, affinity, and negotiated resolution into acoustic liveness, fully resonant (or equally important, muffled) across geographic, ethnic, linguistic, and technical fissures' (p. 17).

Although she attributes significant power for collective subversion to the sonic, Jaji is not calling for previous, ocular-centric models of modernity to be replaced with one based solely on aural perception. Rather, she asserts that '[l]istening acutely does not diminish the value of the visual or other senses, but rather trains our attention upon the circulation of meanings among the senses, reminding us of how artificial it is to imagine that each sense is autonomous. This sense of listening as opening up other sensory and imaginative channels resonates in stereomodernism as an account of how music activates other fields of cultural production' (p. 19).

Jaji is not suggesting uniformity or even harmonious interactions among the art and artists outlined in *Africa in Stereo*. While she foregrounds the critical importance of diasporic solidarity and the interactions that propagate it, she does so with the understanding that 'practicing solidarity is hard work [and] offers us an opportunity to consider pan-Africanism not so much as a movement that has or has not succeeded, but as a continuum of achievements and apparent failures that can only be understood in toto' (p. 18). The 'serious play' and work of diasporic solidarity do not follow those expeditious and well-trodden routes paved by high modernism, but rather a plethora of roughly hewn and improvised approaches to modern subjectivity that allow for creative resolution and the working out of apparent failures by those whom 'Modernity' had already failed.

Inasmuch as Jaji explores the interplay among many authors and artists whose literature, poetry, music and film form a dense but highly resonant and referential polyphony throughout *Africa in Stereo*, she further reinforces the power of their achievements and her arguments by employing a similar approach in her presentation of the text, augmented as it is by a companion website of contextual information, audio clips and hyperlinks to cited websites. The polyvocality of *Africa in Stereo* is accented still more by the arrangement of the text on the page, where these multiple sources intermingle with footnotes (rather than endnotes) and ample quotations (always appearing in their original language before the author's bracketed translations).

In short, Jaji has demonstrated an artistic style to textual arrangement informed by and emblematic of the stereomodernism she theorizes: she amplifies the probity of her arguments by mirroring the salient aspects of her objects of study in the monograph's surface structures. It is most fitting that Jaji ends *Africa in Stereo* with a discussion of the Colossi of Memnon, the mythological singing statues of Ethiopia, about which she writes: 'Occasionally, things shift into place, and for a moment stones sing' (p. 247). Given her attention to the aesthetics of the page, I would most assuredly include this monograph in this tradition: for its attention to and recurrent replication of the sonic power of text, *Africa in Stereo* sings. In this way and in many others, Jaji has written an innovative book that foregrounds the probative value of interdisciplinary and intermedia scholarship.

Hopefully, *Africa in Stereo* will inspire subsequent works in the fields of comparative literature, media studies and the fine arts that emulate Jaji's approach to imaginative, rigorous diversity in both subject matter and methodology.

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KATRINA DALY THOMPSON, *Zimbabwe's Cinematic Arts: language, power, identity*. Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press (pb \$27–978 0 25300 651 6). 2013, 256 pp.

Katrina Daly Thompson's study of Zimbabwean film and television presents a valuable addition to the ever-expanding corpus of analytical and historical studies on African film and media. Very few book-length studies exist on this topic; in fact, only a handful of books cover the film and television industries of single African countries (with South Africa being one of the exceptions), and for that reason alone the book also offers a useful contribution to African film history and theory. Thompson's focus thus reflects a shift in studying African screen media from a continental or regional comparative perspective to in-depth studies of the national cinemas and screen media of specific African countries.

Thompson's interdisciplinary approach is of interest to a range of scholars working within areas such as African cultural studies, popular culture, film and screen media. I particularly commend her inclusion of television, as very few studies have looked at the development and reception of television in postcolonial African countries, from either regulatory or audience perspectives. But as Thompson argues, there are good reasons to examine film and television together, as there is often not a big distinction between African audiences' film and television viewing habits, in the absence of developed cinema infrastructures in many African countries.

Thompson's main aim is a study of how 'cinematic arts' express cultural identity in Zimbabwe. As 'cinematic' is usually associated with film, the term 'screen media' might have been more apt but she justifies and explains the choice of the term convincingly. She studies what she terms 'talk and texts' about the cinematic arts, an inventive and useful approach that looks not only at the primary texts of film and television productions, but also at the public discourse by audiences and practitioners surrounding these productions. The study also interprets how these debates have been received by the Zimbabwean public by linking reception and interpretation to the notion of Zimbabwean cultural identity – an admittedly complex task, as the author states that identity should be understood as socially constructed, and that it is as complex and multifaceted in Zimbabwe as it is in any other multilingual, multi-ethnic postcolonial African state. As Thompson points out, Zimbabwe has had a complex and contentious postcolonial history, and her study presents a shift from a focus on its well-documented economic and political crises towards an impending cultural crisis.

Thompson's writing is interspersed with captivating anecdotes of her time doing field research in Zimbabwe, which add to the book's readability. Chapter 1 outlines the complex and problematic history of representation in Zimbabwe. Because of the country's colonial history and experiences of continuing cultural imperialism in the post-independence era, this is still mostly taking place from the outside. This fact makes the book's focus on case studies of the 'marginalized discourse' offered by viewers and local cultural practitioners most welcome,