

“Christianity, Commerce and Civilization” with another C—for Civil engineering. This implies that a specific type of engineering might well have served as moral justification for colonialism through various infrastructure projects, from railways to dams, roads to ports. Exploring rich archival resources, unlike some recent books on empire, Andersen argues that such a lofty claim for civil engineering did not come easily. It had to be generated by extraprofessional actions such as the creation of informal networks with political administrators in London, and especially with the hub of elite consulting engineers in Westminster, so that through the ICE they could lobby for and influence projects in Africa. They had to associate themselves with decision-makers in the colonies for tenders, conceiving projects, and protection. In explaining this evolving relationship, Andersen uses the concept of “bridgeheads” to “recognize the pluralism of British society” and “the co-existence of different” British imperial interests (4). Building the empire meant tapping and dispersing the advanced technology of the later Victorian era.

In lucid language the book sustains a fairly balanced analysis through six connected chapters. It is a model of careful research on developments of science and technology in Africa and one that goes beyond the more predictable approaches of imperialism studies. Without relying on usual sources such as UNESCO’s *General History of Africa* or the Cambridge *History of Africa*, Andersen turns to extensive archives, contemporary periodicals and letters, and technical reports to provide a thick account of the networks through which engineers fashioned the structures and infrastructure of empire. Less familiar than accounts of missionaries and colonial officers, these moral and political narratives of building are essential to deep cultural studies of imperial Africa at the turn of the century.

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RELIGION

Robert M. Baum. *West Africa’s Women of God: Alinesitoué and the Diola Prophetic Tradition*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016. x + 301 pp. Photographs and Maps. Glossary. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$80.00. Cloth. \$32.00. Paper. ISBN: 978-0-253-01767-3.

Robert M. Baum’s first book, *Shrines of the Slave Trade: Diola Religion and Society in Precolonial Senegal* (Oxford University Press, 1999) challenged conventional scholarly notions regarding change-resistant African societies by tracing precolonial Diola responses to the Atlantic slave trade through innovative religious rituals and the emergence of particular shrines and

their attendant ceremonies. His latest book, *West Africa's Women of God: Alinesitoué and the Diola Prophetic Tradition*, continues and strengthens this overall research thrust by extending the time frame forward into the colonial era and by focusing specifically on prophets as an innovative form of religious response to the particular political, economic, and environmental challenges that confronted rural Diola in the context of intensifying colonial pressures. Although the time periods and specific foci are different, Baum's punch line remains largely the same: Diola are both exceptional and exemplary, and their innovative religious practices help transform our image of seemingly static rural African societies.

In *West Africa's Women of God*, Baum charts the emergence of a predominantly women's prophetic tradition through meticulous historical detail, an especially admirable feat for a region and a people with scant and scattered written historical records. Baum's skillful use of oral history and contextual sources provides a rich account of an otherwise obscure tradition of prophetic practice among the Diola of the Upper Guinea Coast. By identifying precolonial examples of Diola prophetism through a painstaking reconstruction of the elusive processes of religious incorporation among neighboring ethnic groups such as the Koonjaen and Bainounk, Baum convincingly locates the advent of Diola prophetism prior to Muslim, Christian, or European colonial influence in the region, thereby debunking a widely held contention that it was derivative of European and/or Islamic practices. (E.g., "A primary example would be Jean Girard's study of Diola charismatic movements which he attributes almost exclusively to the disruption accompanying the colonial conquest . . ." [39]; see *Genèse du pouvoir charismatique en Basse Casamance [Sénégal]*, Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire, 1969).

Baum is at his best when detailing the life and teachings of Alinesitoué Diatta, the most well-known Diola prophet whose short, influential, and ultimately tragic life in colonial Senegal during World War II culminated in widespread and profound transformations in Diola religious practice. French colonial authorities perceived Alinesitoué's powerful impact across Diola communities as a threat to their regime; she was arrested in 1942, tried and convicted of fomenting rebellion, and exiled to an internment camp in Timbuctou, where she died from scurvy in 1944. Baum not only details her life story, but also delineates the multilayered aspects of her teachings, emphasizing the religious bases of her economic and political critiques.

She saw a strong connection between the loss of autonomy, the arrest of *awasena* [Diola traditional religion] leaders, agricultural innovations facilitated by the French, the growth of invasive new religions, and migrant labor. She linked them to the Diola failure to observe a day of rest and retain a family-focused method of rice farming, and their neglect of ritual obligations. . . . In the short time that she taught, Alinesitoué radically reshaped *awasena* religion and the basis of Diola community identity. (126)

Uncovering the history of Diola prophetism and its transformation from an exclusively male to a predominantly female tradition might have been enough, but one of the book's broader and more enduring contributions lies in Baum's elucidation of the significance of this otherwise neglected or misinterpreted history for our understanding of African religions. Baum argues (contra John Mbiti) that Diola prophets are on a par with those of Abrahamic religions (Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad) because they communicated directly with a supreme being (in this case, Emitai), conveyed their teachings to groups beyond their own, and changed the status quo—even while demanding a return to certain aspects of traditional observance—by establishing “a new kind of community” (9). This claim entails significant revisions of several tenacious theoretical models of African religions, including Paul Radin's view of “earthbound” divine revelation (*African Folktales*, Princeton University Press, 1970), and Robin Horton's theory of African cosmology (*Patterns of Thought in Africa and the West: Essays on Magic, Religion, and Science*, Cambridge University Press, 1993). In these and other ways the book corrects several stubborn misconceptions: that African supreme beings are remote and African religions are devoid of prophets; that Diola prophetism derived from colonial, Christian, and/or Muslim influences; and that women's religious authority was largely constrained to the domestic sphere.

Beyond these refutations of Africanist scholarship on religion, Baum's most interesting critical intervention is to expose—and ultimately challenge—the “Senegalization of a Diola messenger of God” (182). He examines the various ways in which Alinesitoué's story has been appropriated and simplified to fit the purposes of late colonial and postcolonial Senegal, and ultimately Alinesitoué's placement—by Abdou Diouf, in his effort to unite northern and secessionist southern Senegal—in the canon of Senegalese anticolonial national heroes. These nationalist narratives of Alinesitoué instrumentally emphasize her political and anticolonial role but tend to pay short shrift to—or totally ignore—the religious dimensions of her movement. Baum effectively reinstates Alinesitoué as a prophet whose most distinct insight was her religious critique of economic policies. “It is not as the Joan of Arc of the Diola or of the Senegalese that she should be remembered,” he says, “but as a prophetic voice against early forms of what became the Green Revolution, which promised so much and emancipated so few” (183).

Baum's rewriting of Alinesitoué's contested legacy is compelling, and it raises several questions regarding Alinesitoué herself and the gender shift in religious authority. For example, Baum emphasizes the complex, interconnected, and analytical aspects of Alinesitoué's insights, asserting that she saw links among such phenomena as drought, outmigration of men, peanut farming, forced labor, military conscription, taxes, the growth of Islam, and the increased collusion between Vichy France and the Catholic Church. He paints her not only as a kind of prescient Green Revolutionary activist, but perhaps even more as an early political ecologist. But how,

exactly, was she able to “see” all of these links? Baum raises an excellent question regarding the particular biographical features of Alinesitoué’s life and the very curious fact of her analytical insights and religious authority, but I would have appreciated a more elaborated view of Baum’s own understanding of this conundrum.

Likewise, Baum delves into an intriguing inquiry into the transformation from a male to a female prophetic tradition. He locates the seeds of this shift in the twin crises of colonialism and drought, and the perceived inability of older spirits and male religious leadership to deal effectively with these pressures. More specifically, colonialism intensified gender division in favor of male power, but paradoxically weakened male authority because of the empirical incapacity of men to combat colonial strictures. This, Baum contends, had the unintended consequence of opening up receptivity to women’s religious authority. These are valuable insights, but it seems problematic to locate the emergence of female religious leadership so fully in the failure of men. Even more, such circumstances might have led to very different outcomes (as they did elsewhere in Africa). A more robust explanation for why these factors prompted this particular kind of response would have added even more depth to our understanding of both the exceptionalism of the Diola and the broader dynamics of gender politics.

These minor quibbles should not detract from what is, overall, a masterful and meticulous study of religious history. *West Africa’s Women of God* makes evident Baum’s multifaceted capacities as an insightful ethnographer of an often-misrepresented people, a historian committed to carefully challenging specious assumptions about rural African societies, and a creative scholar of religion dedicated to elevating our collective understanding of African religious traditions.

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LANGUAGES, LITERATURE, CINEMA, AND ARTS

Jade L. Miller. *Nollywood Central*. London: British Film Institute, 2016. vii + 175 pp. Figures and Illustrations. Acknowledgments. Bibliography. Index. \$32.00. Paper. ISBN: 978-1-84457-691-3.

Within the landscape of the fast-growing body of scholarship on Nollywood, Jade Miller’s *Nollywood Central* is a valuable and timely contribution. It is valuable because, as probably the first monograph dedicated (almost) entirely to the analysis of the political economy of the Nigerian video film industry, it offers a wide range of precise information on the industry’s