

Scott M. Youngstedt. *Surviving with Dignity: Hausa Communities of Niamey, Niger*. Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books. 2013. xv + 226 pp. List of Photos. List of Figures and Tables. Acknowledgments. Notes. Bibliography. Index. About the Author. \$85.00. Cloth.

For more than thirty-five years I have lived with and thought about the social lives of West African peoples—both in West Africa and in New York City. Although I have learned much about the texture of life from my West African teachers, and I have come to admire many of the men and women who have patiently taught me about being in the world, my greatest respect is reserved for their existential dignity. Confronted with unimaginable poverty and deep social and cultural alienation, the West African men and women I've known in Niger and in New York City have consistently demonstrated grit, fortitude, and an admirable capacity for social resilience.

The steadfast capacity for dignified social resilience is the central theme of Scott Youngstedt's insightful new book, *Surviving with Dignity: Hausa Communities of Niamey, Niger*. This work is a deeply humanistic and moving portrait of the trials and tribulations of Hausa men in Niamey, the capital city of the world's poorest country. The nuanced description that fills Youngstedt's book bears witness to the virtues of conducting long-term ethnographic fieldwork, which in Youngstedt's case constitutes a twenty-year period in Niger. Given this depth of ethnographic experience, it is no surprise that the author describes without sentimentality the challenges of daily life in a space of deep and intractable poverty. To his considerable credit, Youngstedt does not reduce poverty—or dignity—to a statistical profile or a discourse of disembodied analysis. Instead, he skillfully tells a wide range of stories that evoke the myriad existential challenges that his Niamey friends have confronted and struggled to overcome.

Youngstedt tells the story of these people through the prism of the *hira*, an informal conversation group in the Hausa communities of Niamey which, like similar groups (or *fakarey*) among the neighboring Songhay, is the cornerstone of social life. As Youngstedt writes:

Hira groups are of supreme importance in the lives of male Hausa migrants in Niamey. In the context of globalization, they serve as a public space to comment interactively on contemporary life, consider the outside world, and share ideas about how to make sense of and respond to the forces of modernity. Hira provides men with a sense of dignity and self-respect, valuable connections for navigating the economic and social logistics of living in a diaspora, and crucial resources for mediating changing and competing worlds of meaning. (122)

In this way the reader learns about the Hausa capacity for dignified social resilience not from an applied social theory, but from the vantage

of a long-standing and centrally important cultural institution. This ground-level perspective not only gives the book a healthy authenticity, but also presents the reader with a palpable portrait of the daily struggles that Hausa men in Niamey face with a dignity. They have much to teach us all.

Youngstedt's clear and compelling narratives demonstrate how the everyday confrontation with urban poverty can result in an admirable social resilience. Youngstedt also illustrates how the power of ethnography can be used to represent a complex social reality that defies systematic reduction. This book is a model of and for contemporary ethnography, African studies, and urban anthropology. As in all good books, when you reach the final pages of *Surviving with Dignity*, you will be sad that your reading experience has come to an end.

Paul Stoller

West Chester University

West Chester, Pennsylvania

pstoller@wcupa.edu

doi:10.1017/asr.2014.103

Cherry Leonardi. *Dealing With Government in South Sudan: Histories of Chiefship, Community and State*. Woodbridge, Suffolk, U.K.: James Currey, 2013. xvi + 253 pp. Map. Photographs. Bibliography. Index. \$80.00, £45.00. Cloth.

Recent journalistic accounts of conflicts in the new state of South Sudan have tended to interpret them as between the age-old antagonistic “tribes” of the Dinka and the Nuer. An earlier and influential generation of anthropologists and Africanists (notably E. E. Evans-Pritchard and Godfrey Lienhardt) described the southern Sudanese region as one of leaderless “stateless societies.” More recent historians’ accounts have seen tribes and chiefs as “inventions” of colonial rule, with imagined myths of identity and creation. Many have argued that local chiefs have existed at least since the colonial era—but were they in reality the representatives of local groups or of the central government? Accounts of the southern Sudanese independence movements have described the changing relationships between the Sudan Peoples’ Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) and those who were seen, or saw themselves, as local chiefs. The complex and contradictory nature of political power in southern Sudan exemplifies and perhaps even exceeds that of the rest of Africa. Anyone seeking to understand this complexity, rather than applying any of these old clichés, will now have to start with Leonardi’s important and sophisticated book.

It is perhaps not an easy read for those who know nothing of earlier literature on the region, and journalists or students with little knowledge of South Sudan might do better to start with more straightforward works such as Douglas Johnson’s *The Root Causes of Sudan’s Civil Wars* (James Currey, 2012). But Leonardi’s book will for a long time be central