

BOOK REVIEW

Tejumola Olaniyan. *State and Culture in Postcolonial Africa: Enchantings*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017. vii + 323 pp. Photographs. Bibliographical References. Notes. Index. \$40.00. Paper. ISBN: 9780253029980.

In a pragmatic re-framing of the African postcolonial process, Tejumola Olaniyan and the contributing authors of *State and Culture in Postcolonial Africa: Enchantings* describe the extraordinary, and academically unattended, cultural cross-section of the African postcolonial state. Breaking from traditional, and often detrimental, analytical approaches which consider the postcolonial state in separate elements, such as isolated political commentary or a narrow discussion on the end results of socioeconomic status, Olaniyan and the contributors demand (and deliver) an epistemological re-conceptualization of the state as a holistic and culturally created, comprised, and sustained process. The repressive institutional processes of the state have engendered a postcolonial generation of creative cultural productivity (5), but this nuanced influence has yet to be integrated into analyses of the state.

This volume, illustratively selected and logically ordered, provides a paradigmatic remedy to the disjointed and compartmentalized standing discussion of the processes of the state by first anchoring the reader in African cultural reality through the voices of African writers and theorists such as Frantz Fanon, Chinua Achebe, and Wole Soyinka. The authors guide the reader through the web of cultural microcosms that demonstrate the cultural processes themselves: politics, literature, philosophy, soccer, television, theater, women's studies, literary archeology, (prison) poetry, Nollywood, music, Koranic teaching practices, print media, the politics of space, squatter vs. urban membership, and urban garrison architecture. Taken together, these cultural processes and activities, as artfully described and qualified in turn by the volume's contributors, are central to the proposed redefinition of the state itself as genre of culture (13).

Drawing the initial metaphorical line in the sand to delineate the unabashed agenda of the volume, Patrick Chabal, the author of the first chapter, "Culture and the Study of Politics in Postcolonial Africa," establishes the absurdity of defining African cultures, and the postcolonial state, on the Western social science spectrum. In fact, he calls for a total redesign of

Western socio-analytical frameworks that require the notion of culture to remain as an addition to the conversation of political discussion instead of allowing culture to become an encompassing system of socially constitutive meanings in order to fully grasp what it means to be an agent or element of the state (28–29). It is in this domain that the puzzle of the socio-political sphere becomes lucid and recursive in definition and function, reappearing at every connection within the web of cultural/institutional elements.

This volume productively brings this shared recursive characteristic between the state and its cultural parts to the chronotopic plane, as explained by Matthew Brown in Chapter Five, “The Enchanted History of Nigerian State Television,” to link the state to its cultural inner workings. The African state is a socio-historically fueled and producing machine, simultaneously grappling with the vestigial influences of past colonial rule and the current demands of modernization (95–96). So too is this temporal struggle evident at the grassroots level in culturally produced elements such as television (Chapter Five), Nollywood (Chapter Ten, “Jesus Christ, Executive Producer,” Akin Adesokan), and the re-formulation, or lack thereof, of gender roles in a postcolonial society (Chapter Seven, “Fissures of Trespass: Women as Agents of Transgression amid National Disenchantment,” Nevine El Nossery) in which the archaic and the modern converge, creating a phenomenon that deserves unique analysis. This elucidation of the state as a site of temporal engagement and tension is a pillar of the broader argument for a cultural analysis of the African postcolonial state as one that is still establishing its repertoire of self-ownership.

Further accelerating the broader argument toward the reanalysis of the African postcolonial state as an institution of cultural convergence is the undercurrent of commentary on power—its distribution and locations. In Chapter Fifteen, “Gaining Ground, Squatters and the Right to the City,” Anne-Maria Makhulu showcases how agency, authority, and their respective sites are linked to the meta-machinations of the state, with the underlying question: where does the state fit in the modernized world and on whose authority? For the African postcolonial state and Olaniyan and contributors, epistemological, theoretical, and pragmatic questions surrounding authority, ownership, and institutional forward progression should commence in the realm of culture. Curious readers inquiring the same should seek out this volume.

Sarah Clark 

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Urbana, Illinois

sarahc4@illinois.edu

doi:10.1017/asr.2020.33

For additional reading on this subject, the ASR recommends:

Allman, Jean M. 2019. “#HerskovitsMustFall? A Meditation on Whiteness, African Studies, and the Unfinished Business of 1968.” *African Studies Review* 62 (3): 6–39.
doi: 10.1017/asr.2019.40.

- Jewsiewicki, Bogumil. 1989. "African Historical Studies Academic Knowledge as 'Usable Past' and Radical Scholarship." *African Studies Review* 32 (3): 1–76. doi: [10.2307/524548](https://doi.org/10.2307/524548).
- Owomoyela, Oyekan. 1994. "With Friends Like These ... A Critique of Pervasive Anti-Africanisms in Current African Studies Epistemology and Methodology." *African Studies Review* 37 (3): 77–101. doi: [10.2307/524903](https://doi.org/10.2307/524903).