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Africa Every Day: Fun, Leisure, and Expressive Culture on the Continent ed. by Oluwakemi M. Balogun et al. (review)

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African Studies Review, Volume 64, Number 3, September 2021, pp. E11-E13 (Review)

Published by Cambridge University Press



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BOOK REVIEW

Oluwakemi M. Balogun, Lisa Gilman, Melissa Graboyes, and Habib Iddrisu, eds. *Africa Every Day: Fun, Leisure, and Expressive Culture on the Continent*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2019. ix + 330 pp. Photographs. Maps. Notes. Bibliography. \$36.95. Paper. ISBN: 13 978-0-89680-324-4.

What happens in Africa every day? What topics do news channels, social media, and university courses in the so-called developed world never cover? What might counter the prevailing pathologizing of Africa? *Africa Every Day: Fun, Leisure, and Expressive Culture on the Continent* (edited by Oluwakemi M. Balogun, Lisa Gilman, Melissa Graboyes, and Habib Iddrisu), a collection of twenty-nine concise essays, proposes to tell us. These essays illuminate activities and social behaviors as diverse as being a happy child in a company town in Namibia, mall-shopping as retail therapy and identity formation in Botswana, shoring up masculinity in tennis clubs in Igbo land, maintaining courtship rituals in Uganda among the displaced Acoli people, illegally dubbing Indian and Hollywood films in Swahili to make them “relatable” to Tanzanian audiences, and singing linguistically roiled work songs in Ghana to disguise fishermen’s political opinions.

Organized in seven categories, “Celebrations and Rites of Passage,” “Socializing and Friendship,” “Love, Sex and Marriage,” “Sports and Leisure,” “Performance, Language and Creativity,” “Technology and Media,” and “Labor and Livelihoods,” each entry is accompanied by a helpful map of the continent which locates the country in question, implying at once the individuality, vastness, and historical unity (through trade routes and colonial incursions) of Africa. Editors Oluwakemi Balogun and Melissa Graboyes situate the essays, in a fine introduction, within a sociological approach that yokes together the aesthetics and practices of daily life in order to foster a better understanding of the underlying social patterns.

Several themes emerge prominently: the complexity of cosmopolitan modernity, the ongoing commitment to longstanding rituals which provide meaning and structure to society, the creeping globalization that brings about a concomitant desire for spectacularized consumption but also a


remarkable ease in communication (thanks to the astonishing boom in cell phones), transnational arts movements that unite Africa and its diaspora, and continuing gender segregation. More theorization would have been helpful in order to help the reader understand better how these themes intersect with similar concerns across the globe. In some cases, descriptions clamor for follow-up. The many authors included, trained and dedicated participant observers and/or archivists, have pulled their contributions from longer studies cited in the bibliography, all of which can and should be consulted by readers wishing for deeper investigation of the topics covered.

A number of essays, owing to their subtle theorization or layered descriptions, are especially compelling. Scott Youngstedt's analysis of the many reasons why Niamayans celebrate Western New Year's Eve, for example, demonstrates both the Niamayans' resistance to increasing religious conservatism and their effort to move Niger into the global community. Steven Van Wolputte's reporting on Himba women's polyamorous relationships shows how they, like the Niamayans, likewise alarm the elites of their country (Namibia), while creating useful networks and relationships built on mutual pleasure. Wrestling in Senegal, in Cheikh Tidiane Lo's trenchant depiction, speaks to the persistence of folk culture and to the proliferation of multi-faceted big-time sports entertainment, in which star wrestlers recite poems and impact elections. Never ones to miss a beat, the Chinese have accordingly built a monumental stadium in Dakar to showcase the wrestlers and their entourages.

Because each essay in Section V affords pithy insights into the dense entanglements of contemporary social life, the contributions in "Performance, Language, and Creativity" warrant special mention. Mokaya Bosire reports on "Sheng," a Nairobi slang that attests to the creativity of urban youth and their desire to do away with tribal groupings and partisan politics through linguistic invention. Maya Angela Smith breaks down an episode of the *Journal Rappé*, which has been available for viewing since 2013 on a Senegalese hip-hop YouTube channel. Xuman and Keyti, the *Journal Rappé's* entrepreneurial hosts, use humor to skewer corruption, poverty, and unemployment. Rapping in Wolof and in French, they democratize news not only to Senegalese listeners but also to the Senegalese diaspora. Lisa Gilman salutes how the competitive Chilimika dance performance has managed to survive in Malawi, despite rapid urbanization and cultural shifts. Assuring bonding and community, women's dance teams travel from village to village, welcomed by local families at the new year. Gilman suggests, and this could be true for a number of cultural events highlighted in this study, that governments would do well to invest time and money in revitalizing exactly this kind of deeply-anchored artistic expression.

Intended as introductory material for undergraduates, most of the essays are framed by considerations of recent and relevant political and economic stakes. Together, these "snapshots" present a stimulating and often charming

compilation of the ways in which African peoples creatively engage with daily life, enjoying themselves in the process.

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doi:10.1017/asr.2021.59

For additional reading on this subject, the ASR recommends:

- Dolby, Nadine. 2006. "Popular Culture and Public Space in Africa: The Possibilities of Cultural Citizenship." *African Studies Review* 49 (3): 31–47. doi:10.1353/arw.2007.0024.
- July, Robert W. 1983. "Toward Cultural Independence in Africa: Some Illustrations from Nigeria and Ghana." *African Studies Review* 26 (3–4): 119–31. doi:10.2307/524165.
- Simone, AbdouMaliq. 2008. "Some Reflections on Making Popular Culture in Urban Africa." *African Studies Review* 51 (3): 75–89. doi:10.1353/arw.0.0085.