

## REVIEWS

**Tomi Adeaga, Sarah Udoh-Grossfurthner, eds.** *Payback and Other Stories: An Anthology of African and African Diaspora Short Stories*. Vienna: Vienna African Languages and Literatures (VALL) Series, Number 1, 2018, 169 pp.

*Payback and Other Stories: An Anthology of African and African Diaspora Short Stories*, No. 1 in the Vienna African Languages and Literatures (VALL) Series, with Adams Bodomo as Series Editor, is designed to publish books—short stories, poetry, anthologies—as well as journals and monographs on African languages, as part of the well-established European LIT Verlag Series.

The collection comprises nineteen short stories that run anywhere from two pages to thirteen pages, presented in various styles by writers of wide-ranging ages and experiences. It boasts of diverse complex and complicated accounts of cultural experiences in colonial, postcolonial and neocolonial times. Naana Banyiwa Horne sums up succinctly this vastness and the attendant collective awareness of Africans on the continent and in the diaspora, when she states: “The narratives capture not only the angst of seeking meaning in a world that challenges wholeness for African communities and individuals but, above all, look at ways of retrieval of cultural/ancestral knowledge in authenticating themselves.” Indeed, the authors from Ghana, Nigeria, Tanzania, South Africa, and Zimbabwe do go beyond mere geographical map boundaries to reflect other notions determined by racial, historical and sociological factors. In the order in which they are listed in the anthology, the writers and the titles of their works, in parentheses, are: Raphael D’Abdon (“An Easy Sunday Morning”); Tomi Adeaga (“The Letter”); Ada Uzoamaka Azodo (“The Prodigal Son Shall Not Return”); Ernest N. Emenyonu (“A Rigid Code of Silence”); Sarah Udoh-Grossfurthner (“Madam Shopkeeper”); Naana Banyiwa Horne (“Payback”); Tendai Huchu (“The Prestige”); Irehobhude O. Iyioha (“Brave”); Busi Jonathan (“Granted Wish of the Dead”); Neema Komba (“Mother’s Shop”); Sindiwe Magona (“The Most Unidentical Identical Twins”); Setty Mhandu (“The Anointing Softener”); Eric Mwathi (“America 11”); Famia Nkasa (“The Underqualified Saviors”); Mfilinge Nyalusi (“Nyani Mzee: The Old Monkey”); Tanure Ojaide (“When Pastors Took the HIV/AIDS Test”); Chinyere Okafor (“Dropped Doreen Rides High with Jabulani”); Chika Unigwe (“Bethlehem”), and Dennis Walder (The Climb”).

As can be expected, the differences show in the authors' adaptations into the text of aspects of indigenous languages, pidgin, religious fervor, dealings with church missionaries, and complications of travel, exile and immigration, what Charles Larson has seen as the writer "injecting a healthy dose of his own cultural and aesthetic values into a traditional Western genre and created in the process a frequently new and radically different form." Indeed, the writers' individual experiences color their short stories, quite a few times with satire and humor as added value, giving them by so doing distinctive breaths, tones, styles, and perspectives.

From those angles of vision, this collection of short stories taken more globally from the perspective of African literature in toto is a notable contribution to contemporary African and African Diaspora literature in which the victims become agents that defy their lot, stand up against their aggressors and demand their human rights, instead of succumbing to discrimination and abuse.

The major themes that cut across the entire anthology are, in the order portrayed, violence and police brutality, challenges of leaving the home of origin to begin a new life in a new residence in the diaspora, hardship and disappointment of raising some very difficult children, mother-in-law vs. daughter-in-law issues, the dichotomy of African and Western cuisines, the value of African traditional foundations against Western cultural oppression, misogyny, womanizing, gender inequality and male dominance, children's forced invisibility in the face of grow-ups' dominance, human folly vis-à-vis changing world landscape, violence, rape and murder, HIV/AIDS, drug and narcotic addictions, mediums and spirit possession, migration and exile, challenges of single-parenthood, stepmother-stepdaughter problems, lack of or inadequate healthcare, childbirth and postpartum depression (PPD), trauma, institutionalized discrimination, and Apartheid and its defeat.

Thus, the short stories in this anthology mirror subjects that were dear to the people in the past, are still of interest to them today, and will be of utmost appeal to them in the future. Then again, due to their brevity and capability to appeal to the ordinary person, the short stories will likely appeal to the general public, perhaps more than would novels that are elitist and long by their very nature. Furthermore, the writers as performers mimic modern-day versions of the traditional African storytellers of the past; they unify the continent in their own peculiar way, through aspects of their individual ethnic group or country's cultures that come through in their writings. Thanks to the themes, styles, and ellipses within the short stories, the writers portray the diversity of African and African Diaspora experiences. Students stand to learn from the writers and the stories how to (re)construct memorable characters, setting, conflict, point of view, and more in their learning experiences.

That having been said, readers can recognize the import and significance of these excellent short stories only by studying them, partly for their didactic quality, social functions, and the moral forces embedded within them, and partly because the said import and significance go well beyond the aesthetic values of the stories.

Finally, the writers in this anthology have presented literature in forms that are more attuned to the peoples' lifestyles. Earlier African writers preferred the novel genre because they were formed in that tradition under colonialism. But things have changed rapidly since then. More and more writers today embrace shorter forms, such as the short story, poetry, journalistic jottings, and so on, published in hardcopies in newspapers and book anthologies, and through Kindle on the PC and online, just because they are more suited to the peoples' lives on the go. And, for the present and the future, with the growing speed of technology and communication, people have less time for long discourses, but rather prefer shorter pieces that go to the heart of the matter right from the beginning. The writers in this anthology and their short stories, then, do play a part in helping the reading public understand how Africans and their peoples in the African Diaspora can survive the present and win the future.

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**Raphael Chijioke Njoku.** *West African Masking Traditions and Diaspora Masquerade Carnivals: History, Memory, and Transnationalism (Rochester Studies in African History and the Diaspora) (Volume 88).* Rochester: Rochester University Press, 2020. Xvii + 296 pages. \$19.00

Scholars have extensively debated the degree of African continuities in the New World. The historiography reveals a long and vigorous debate characterized by the attempts to affirm African cultural retentions in the Atlantic Diaspora, the challenge to the claim that African cultures were transmitted into the diaspora, and a middle road approach that sought to privilege the notion of hybridity in a cultural complex that was neither purely African nor European. Considering the more than half a century of this scholarly debate, one wonders what is left undone. Apparently, new grounds continue to be broken, particularly in transnational and Atlantic cultural history, and especially one that centralizes African culture as a framework for understanding aspects of Afro-Atlantic cultures. Nigerian eclectic historian Raphael Njoku's most recent work has added to this tapestry of the African diaspora studies and debate in a fundamentally significant way.

In *West African Masking Traditions*, Njoku explores the “origins, religious idioms, symbols, internal and diasporic diffusions, and the music, dance, and drama that accompany African and African Diaspora masks and masquerade performances.” With its focus on the Igbo of the Biafra Coast, this book adds to the scholarship of a very influential group in the making of the Atlantic world due to its proportionately high number of exports of enslaved persons during the Atlantic slave trade. Despite a large number of enslaved Igbo who made the involuntary crossing of the Middle Passage, their history, identity, and impact has been largely neglected, misrepresented, and misunderstood. Njoku’s book reveals that Igbo cultural practices were an essential element in the construction of New World culture in ways that survived their trauma and became deeply implanted in the masking and festival traditions of the African Diaspora.

Essentially, the author argues that “African epistemologies of religion, music, dance, and other repertoires of ideas embedded in the masquerade phenomenon aided enslaved people to survive oppression” while reinventing African-themed cultural prototypes in the New World. This conscious or unconscious articulation and re-articulation of the new world “contributed to the subsequent growth of what we know today as African American art, music, and literature in particular and the Grand American culture in general.”

Focusing on masquerading traditions in the Africana world a dynamic system of thought, narration, and ideology, this book draws upon a cultural practice whose link to African indigenous ideology and world view enabled it to endure even the face of a systematic attempt to suppress such critical elements of African personhood under slavery and servitude. As the author affirms, for enslaved people, “the art of masquerade *engagee* was one of the most potent

survival devices in the Americas.” But the book does more than that expose. It engages the debate and historiography on African continuities in the Atlantic world but calls for a framework

that “recognizes the complexities inherent in the cross-regional diffusion of ideas and symbols.”

In chapter one, the book explores the origins of masking and its early development. The chapter places the history and ritual observance associated with the masking tradition to indigenous religion, spirituality, and ritual abstractions that make the intangible spirit world tangible through “the ingenuity of physically costuming “spirit beings” for the public theater.” Thus, masquerading is a reflection of the duality through which groups such as the Igbo articulate the world—the physical and spirit worlds as expressed through music, costumes, and performance art forms.

To understand this complex world of art, performance, and spirituality as expressed through masquerade traditions, the book explores “Aspects of Society and Culture in the Biafra Hinterland,” to offer explanations on the potentials and possibilities of a small cultural space to have an enduring influence of regional and global significance. This approach has important implications for understanding the trajectory of cultural dispersal and transatlantic perspective and framework. In essence, to situate African culture in the diaspora, it is essential to understand the African background of the enslaved Africans, their cultural milieu that gave rise to their worldview and practices, and the capacity of that world to endure.

Perhaps, one of the most important contributions of this book to African and African Diaspora studies is its articulation of the notion of culture within what he called Bantu Culture Area.” Bantu speakers had their origin in the Bight of Biafra cultural zone, and their spatial spread highlighted their role as “culture modeling agents.” This book characterizes the spread of the masquerading tradition as an extension of the Bantu as culture bearers to firmly leave their imprint in their new environment despite the different contexts through which they arrived in the New World as forced migrants.

The above background provides the reader with the context to understand the rest of the book. The next chapter, “Bight of Biafra, Slavery, and Diasporic Africa in the Modern Global Age,” support the need to understand the origins, the histories, and identities of enslaved Africans from the Bight of Biafra and its hinterland as a framework for articulating their influence in relation to time and place. Centralizing the African side of the equation, the chapter accounts for the expansion of masquerading culture into the Americas, drawing on the transatlantic slavery connection and how the enslaved served as “modeling agents in the New World,” through the masquerade carnivals and cultural performances associated with art.

Chapter five focuses on “Igbo Masquerade Dances in the African Diasporas: Symbols

and Meanings,” Here, Njoku uses the Igbo, a group that contributed a disproportionately high number of the enslaved Africans from the Bight of Biafra to explain the process of cultural diffusion as hybridity. Chapter six, “Unmasking the Masquerade: Counterideologies and Contemporary Practices,” Njoku explores the diverse meanings of masks and masquerades within a cultural milieu shaped by the intersection of many forces – Christianity, Islam, and Western cultural hegemony – but one in which masquerade carnivals assumed a new role in the African Diasporas, including as a strategy of resistance. In chapter seven, “Idioms of Religion, Music, Dance, and Africana Art Forms,” Njoku “highlights the integral meanings of the various cultural forms in the lives of people of African

descent." The chapter raises important questions that suggest continuity as well as the fungibility of identity. An important lesson from this chapter is the fluidity of cultures and identities across the Atlantic world. Yet the African background formed the basis of new intellectual production as expressed in music and dance.

The last chapter, "Memory and Masquerade Narratives: The Story of Remembering," redirects attention to the "effectiveness of masquerade carnivals in structuring narrative forms that ... respond to the needs of those societies that created them. Masquerade narratology, the author argues, "changes as the society transforms," implying the dynamic nature of culture and the adaptability of cultural practices with a new contextual setting of competing ideas, ideologies, and sensibilities.

The book brings fresh insight into old questions in a highly stimulating and intellectually sophisticated way. It is a delight to read. I recommend it highly to all scholars of African and African diaspora studies.

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**Nkuzi Micheal Nnam.** *Igbo Jurisprudence: An African Philosophy of Law.* Goldline and Jacobs Publishing, 2020, 238 pp

Colonial powers in Africa used laws as a major means of imposing hegemony over colonial territories. The British volitionally failed to establish a legal system in Africa in accordance with the African custom, and the laws introduced were designed to ensure that the colonized would not rise up against the colonizers or to struggle for autonomy. African customary laws were portrayed as "primitive." But are African customary laws really primitive? How did African's preside over cases in the pre-colonial era and what principles guided their logic? Does the so-called "primitive" law deserve more attention and respect that the western jurisprudence had enjoyed? How has the imported legal system affected the African jurisprudence? The above are the thought-provoking questions investigated by Nkuzi Nnam in *Igbo Jurisprudence*.

In *Igbo Jurisprudence*, Nnam undertook a comparative study of an African and Anglo-American jurisprudence. He argues that the western judicial system had prevailed to the detriment of the African customary legal system. This is shown in the way many, if not all access western jurisprudence. Nnam claims that there are more contrasts than similarities between the Igbo and western jurisprudence. In his view, the Igbo believe that laws are natural and are inseparable from religion, and any deviation from that incurs the anger of the gods on the people. No one has the right

to take the life of another. But when one chooses to do instead, he will be forced to take his own life. That is why Nnam used the adage “*Osisi Kpara eso na eso ya ana*” (a millipede is gotten rid with the stick on which it coiled).

On the contrary, their Anglo-American counterpart does not acknowledge natural law, it must be made by man, just like an “arrow is directed by the archer”. Additionally, in Igbo jurisprudence, offenses are based on the principle of collective responsibility” unlike the “individual responsibility” that prevails in the west. The author explained the idea of collative responsibility using a metaphoric expression of a canoe on the sea. It is assumed that all are traveling on a canoe that can sink, leaving no one alive. If one commits *aru* (Crime) or *nso ala* (taboo), he tries to contribute to the sinking of the canoe. It will now require a collective effort to paddle the canoe or else it sinks- one must “be his brother’s keeper.

Legal testimonies are valued in Igboland. The law regards the defendant’s action as a sin that will affect the entire community, himself included, and the witness is bound in conscience to testify. Whereas in the Western court, witnesses are viewed as traitors and could be subjected to losses including his life. The end of the Western court system is to divulge the guilty and the innocent. But the Igbo traditional case trial is reconciliation, pacification, unification, and reintegration of adversaries into the society.

Nnam makes other claims in the book. In chapter one he addressed the conceptual and methodological issues as well as an examination of the traditional background of Nigeria societies. These are contrasted through a comparative global perspective. In Chapter two the author explores the traditional law in precolonial and Nigerian society. He claims that most African laws are similarly reasoned because they stem from a “natural law” perspective. The concept of law according to Natural Law theorists is the focus of chapter three. He argues that law and rights are inextricably intertwined and shape the nature of African conceptions of law. Chapter Four is an overview of the legal reasoning among the Igbo. Clearly, Nnam noted that the British should have considered the uniqueness and variedness of the Igbo custom, tradition, belief (*Omenani*) which determines their legal reasoning, before imposing their western legal style of jurisprudence on them. However, Nnam, impels Igbo professors, law students, lawyers, Judges to acknowledge not only the fact that the Igbo jurisprudence has its own contribution to make, but deserve as much respect as their western counterparts.

Nnam concluded that besides the fact that Anglo-American culture is relatively homogeneous and Nigeria is not, most of the distinctions examined in the book can be accounted for by the distinct aim of the Western court system which is to discover and separate the guilty party from the

innocent. In contrast, the primary goal of Nigerian traditional case trials is “reconciliation, pacification, propitiation, and unification of both parties regardless of who is guilty and who is innocent.”

Nnam attains his objectives. His work is well organized and articulated, and of the high quality. The author’s diction is simple and understandable. It is pertinent that the book is made accessible in the Igbo law library, for lawyers, law students, academics, prisoners, and anyone undergoing research on the related field.

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