

## BOOK REVIEWS

**The Comparative Imagination. On The History Of Racism, Nationalism, And Social Movements. 1997. George M. Fredrickson. Berkeley: University Of California Press. 259 Pp. \$27.50 cloth.**

George Fredrickson of Stanford University, this year's President of the Organization of American Historians, has devoted much of his distinguished career to the study of the history of race, racism and anti-racism in America, and, at the same time, established himself as one of America's leading comparative historians. The bulk of his comparative work has been devoted to the histories of South Africa and the United States. His first major study was the pioneering *White Supremacy* (1981), which compared white ideologies and practices in the two countries over three centuries. Then, in *Black Liberation* (1995), he focused on "the subaltern side of the color line" (p. 135), exploring black ideologies opposed to white supremacy in the two countries, from the mid-nineteenth century to the 1970s. In 1988 he published a first collection of essays on slavery and race, entitled *The Arrogance of Race*. This new collection comprises, after a largely autobiographical Introduction, eleven essays, previously published for the most part in rather obscure places. All of the essays either reflect upon comparative history or are attempts to write such history. I will confine my comments chiefly to what he says about the comparative method in general and to what may be of particular interest to those in African studies.

Fredrickson is a "splitter", who adopts what he calls a "historicist" approach, which means that he is concerned with the particular, highlights difference as much as similarity, and seeks multiple causation instead of focusing on a limited number of variables. Comparison works best, of course, when the cases being considered show considerable similarities as well as differences. Fredrickson's usual approach is to discuss the one case, then the other, and then to try to explain how they are similar, and how they are different. Some will say that he does not sufficiently overcome in his own work the danger, which he mentions (p. 13), of writing parallel histories rather than genuinely comparative ones. Such work requires, of course, a good grounding in each case. which is why he advises against treating more than two, or at the most three cases (pp.10-11). Some South African historians criticised *White Supremacy* because they did not agree with what Fredrickson said about aspects of South African history. *Black Liberation*, more narrowly focused and better grounded in primary research, was less open to this kind of criticism.

South African historians should be grateful that so eminent a scholar has devoted so much attention to their history. Fredrickson writes lucidly and his ideas are always stimulating. His willingness to address contemporary issues is admirable, as are his humane, anti-racist concerns. He is not shy of seeking to derive lessons for the present from the past. He argues that

<http://www.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v2/v2i2reviews.pdf>

the history of race relations shows, for example, those relations to be "a dynamic process that can be made to change course as a result of political action and initiative" (p.131).

This "heterosexual white male of Swedish-American ancestry" (p.18) is surely right that comparative work is both a good antidote to parochialism and important to an understanding of the forces that have shaped world history as a whole. While some comparative work by United States historians has strengthened notions of American exceptionalism, Fredrickson has sought to "transcend the exceptionalist paradigm", by seeing each case as "distinctive, but none truly exceptional" (pp.57-58), although he does argue that the consequences of the Civil War and Reconstruction gave a particular character to American race relations.

The essays here which contrast South Africa and America range from comparisons of the frontier (Ch.2) to the very recent past. They mostly pick up and develop ideas to be found in Fredrickson's own two comparative studies. Chapter Eight, entitled "Reform and Revolution in American and South African Freedom Struggles", makes clearer and more explicit some of the key arguments in *Black Liberation*. Chapter Ten provides a detailed comparison between the American civil rights movement and the South African defiance campaigns, ending with an unusually imprecise comparison between the success of the anti-apartheid movement and Birmingham and Selma. In the last chapter, in which he compares black power and black consciousness, Fredrickson is, as usual, sensitive to the very different contexts in which the two operated. American blacks usually wished to be included, on their own terms, within the society in which they found themselves. The "freedom struggle" in South Africa, by contrast, reflected "the ambition of a majority to rule in its native land" (p.211).

Like other historians, Fredrickson did not anticipate the "negotiated revolution" that took place in South Africa from 1989, but with hindsight he finds the ANC's reformism "not surprising" (p.146). Although he suggests that reform was "forced from below by militant confrontational tactics rather than imposed from above in an effort to head off trouble that had not yet reached crisis proportions" (p.147), it was surely both, and how does one weigh the relative significance of each? While little in *The Comparative Imagination* will be entirely new to those familiar with Fredrickson's major comparative books, no one will be able to read these essays without gaining much food for thought.

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**Aspects of African Archaeology. Papers from the 10th Congress of the PanAfrican Association for Prehistory and Related Studies. Gilbert Pwiti and Robert Soper, eds. University of Zimbabwe Publications, Harare [distributed by the African Books Collective Ltd., Oxford UK]. 1996 857 pp. \$75 paper (42.00 pounds sterling).**

A brief review cannot do justice to an 857-page collection of ninety-eight separate papers presented at the Congress of the PanAfrican Association for Prehistory and Related Studies,

which met in Harare, Zimbabwe in 1995. As the editors point out in their introductory remarks, the meeting showed the Association's viability, after an interval of sporadic and less efficiently reported meetings.

The Congress was notable for full participation of scholars from post-apartheid South Africa and for a strong emphasis on cultural resource management and historical archaeology linking Africa with global history. Two types of papers predominate, each informative and thought-provoking. Some fill in formerly empty temporal and geographical spaces, often where archaeological research had previously been precluded by war or lack of infrastructure. Others incorporate sophisticated analytical and theoretical approaches into studies ranging from *Homo erectus* to Iron Age symbolism.

Below I note the major thematic sections into which papers are grouped, commenting on some pieces of admittedly idiosyncratic selection, in no way reflecting on the quality of papers not specifically noted.

*Hominid Evolution*: four articles, ranging from theoretical models for hominid behavior (Cachel and Harris, Stoppiello) to diagenetic and osteometric studies of bone (Person et al, Santos).

*Palaeoenvironmental Studies*: five pieces, reporting on regions and sites in Egypt (Moeyersons et al.), Libya (Cremaschi and DiLernia), Zambia (Avery), and Zimbabwe (Haynes). Hassan's discussion of "abrupt Holocene climatic events in Africa" synthesizes paleoenvironmental data from several regions.

*Early Stone Age*: seven articles. J. D. Clark, the doyen of African Stone Age studies, discusses hominid decision-making and Acheulian variability. Rogers and Kyara carry such ideas into two landscape-focused studies of lithic utilization. ESA occurrences in Ethiopia (Beyene et al.), Zimbabwe (Klimowicz and Haynes), Mozambique (Meneses), and Sterkfontein, South Africa (Kuman) are reported.

*Middle Stone Age*: eight papers, including Deacon and Wurz on the Howieson's Poort industry at Klasies River Main site, which shows blade-based tool production at 70,000 years BP. Reports on Egypt (van Peer et al.), the Horn (Gresham and Brandt), Congo (Lanfranchi), Tanzania (Willoughby), Zambia (Barham), Zimbabwe (Larsson), and Namibia (Vogelsang) fill in knowledge of MSA variability.

*Late Stone Age*: 14 articles, including provocative findings in the Acacus, Libya (DiLernia and Cremaschi). Four papers are on Kenya and Tanzania; lithic analyses by Barut and Odeny-Odul assess resource use patterns. The Pleistocene-Holocene transition at Shum Laka, Cameroon is described in four papers by Belgian researchers. Smith argues for pre-colonial ethnic differentiation of herders and hunter-gatherers in the Cape region, while Sampson, Klatzow, Opperman, and Mazel describe a complex mosaic of herding and foraging peoples in other southern African areas.

*Rock Art Studies*: three pieces, including a comparison of west Norwegian and southern African art by Waldenhaug and new descriptions of art from Gabon (Oslisly) and Angola (Gutierrez).

*Early Food Production*: ten papers, including Amblard's critique of long-held views on Dar Tichit, Neumann et al.'s report on botanical evidence from Burkina Faso and northeast Nigeria. These and other papers hint that trajectories toward food production in Africa may differ significantly from those documented elsewhere.

*Early Iron Working Communities:* five articles, on the Mandara Mountains of Cameroon-Nigeria (MacEachern), the Interlacustrine region (MacLean), Central African Republic (Yandia), and Upper Tana River, Kenya (Kiriana et al.). Plug notes rare occurrence of chickens in the southern African Early Iron Age which, like house rats, may have entered via the Indian Ocean trade.

*Late Iron-Working Communities:* six pieces, filling in knowledge of technology and exchange from Lake Albert (Connah) to Pate (Wilson and Lali Omar) and Mozambique Islands (Duarte and Meneses) to Botswana (Pearson). Garenne-Marot's analysis of metallurgy in the "medieval" Senegal employs the notion of technological style in a manner worthy of emulation.

*Development of Complexity:* eight papers, ranging from Chad and Nigeria to Aksum to Ntusi, Uganda to Zimbabwe. Notable are assertions by David that a high level of industrial production of iron could exist without classes and political centralization and by Herbert of the intimate link between technological practices in African metallurgy and elite power.

*Historical Archaeology:* nine articles, including several on trans-Saharan links (Insoll, Mayor), on West African coastal trade with Europeans (deCorse, Kelly), the Swahili coast (Kusimba), the Nyanga complex of Zimbabwe (Beach), and Boer South Africa (von Vollenhoven). Several papers demonstrate the value of archaeology for placing Africans within the web of historic world system interactions. Schmidt asserts that understanding African "rhythmed time" aids in reading cyclical patterns of cultural deposition at ritual centers. Schoenbrun seeks to trace development of ideologies of social power through linguistic analysis of key terms in Great Lakes Bantu languages.

*Ethnoarchaeology:* seven pieces, including Lane's thoughtful analysis of applications and limitations of ethnoarchaeology in Africa, and Robertshaw and Kamuhangire's discussion of the intersection of traditional values, archaeological conservation, and the workings of the state. Barndon and Nodoro deal with symbolism in practical action, relative to iron and ceramic production and use. Papers by Ryan et al., Brandt, and Saetersdal deal with specific ethnoarchaeological cases.

*Cultural Resource Management:* twelve papers. In contrast to other volume sections, papers are with one exception by residents of African nations, who daily face the challenges of conserving sites and materials with few resources and often limited legal mandates. Countries represented are Botswana (van Waarden), Kenya (Kibunja, Wandibba), Mozambique (Macamo), Nigeria (Folorunso, Agbaje-Williams), South Africa (Deacon, Miller, van Schalkwyk), and Zimbabwe (Matenga, Pwiti and Mvenge). Van Schalkwyk's discussion of CRM in the "new South Africa" points to the difficult trade-offs in the highly developed economy to which many other African nations aspire, ironically noting "the past is not dead, we are still busy killing it." McIntosh highlights the global crisis in plunder of sites for the art trade, and reproduces the PanAfrican Association's resolution to press for enforcement of international law pertaining to stolen antiquities.

Articles in *Aspects of African Archaeology* are generally of high quality and well-referenced, reflecting sound editorial work by session heads as well as the editors-in-chief. All involved are to be congratulated on the swift appearance of the volume. A few minor flaws may be noted: typos or grammatical problems mar some articles, and the list of contributors is

incomplete. It is, however, well worth obtaining for an overview of Africanist archaeology today. It is useful to archaeologists of any phase of the African archaeological record, paleoanthropologists, and African historians, as well as those interested in global issues in cultural resource management.

In sum, *Aspects of African Archaeology* testifies to the current diversity and vigor of Africanist archaeology. Despite under-funding and many tumultuous events, senior archaeologists have carried on investigating the continent's human past, and younger scholars have committed themselves to continuing this work, often with world-class sophistication. That so much has been accomplished in the face of these challenges bodes well for future archaeological research.

In closing, I relay the editors' note that, despite the African venue, most Congress attendees were based overseas, reflecting their easier access to travel funds. Contact with colleagues is a widely recognized, acute need of Africa-based archaeologists and historians. A concerted fundraising effort for a travel funds endowment should be a top priority for Africanists living elsewhere.

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**African Islam and Islam in Africa: Encounters between Sufis and Islamists, Eva Evers Rosander and David Westerlund, eds. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press. 1997. 347pp \$39.95 cloth, \$19.95 paper.**

*African Islam and Islam in Africa* is another in a growing number of edited volumes devoted to the dynamics of contemporary Muslim communities in Africa. Its sub-title, "Encounters between Sufis and Islamists," refers to the volume's focus on points of conflict involving Muslims who emphasize different aspects of Islamic religiosity and often seem to be irreconcilably opposed on crucial matters of the faith. The authors understand "African Islam" to refer to Muslim beliefs and practices that Africans have contextualized over the years, often under the guidance of Sufis, and "Islam in Africa" to refer to the ideology of religious reform, usually articulated in the Islamist call for greater implementation of the sharia.

The contributors approach these encounters from a variety of disciplinary perspectives, including anthropology, religious studies, international relations, law, and history. Most of the examples are drawn from Muslim communities in the northern third of Africa, including Egypt, the Maghrib, and the "sudanic" belt to the south (stretching from Senegal to the Sudan). Some of the essays are case studies rooted in field research or textual analysis, and others are syntheses devoted to thematic or regional developments.

Several case studies examine the lives of prominent African Muslims. Rose Lake, in her fascinating study of an important Senegalese Mouride leader, Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine Diop, focuses on a lengthy interview with an elderly disciple. This informant's intimate portrait of

Diop highlights the ambiguities of Mouride memories, and adds an additional layer of complexity to the Senegalese past. Abubakar Gumi, the influential Islamist figure associated with the Yan Izala movement in northern Nigeria, is the focus of Roman Loimeier's contribution. In addition to biographical details, Loimeier offers insightful comments that help illuminate the complex politics associated with the Yan Izala's different approaches to Tijaniyya and Qadiriyya Sufi movements in Nigeria. Lisbet Holtedahl and Mahmoudou Djingui use the biography of al-hajji Ibrahim Goni of northern Cameroon to reveal how Fulbe families associated with the military movements of the nineteenth century still utilize Islamic credentials to bolster their social status.

The translation of the Qur'an and Muslim ritual life are the topics of two additional case studies. Justo Lacunza-Balda offers a richly documented analysis of three ki-Swahili translations of Islam's scripture that situates them into the vibrant politics of translation in Tanzania. Sossie Andezian begins her contribution with a wonderfully thick description of an Algerian women's pilgrimage ritual and then raises a cluster of issues associated with gender relations and the representation of authority. Her essay, a translation of an article she previously published in French, is a provocative engagement of the anthropological literature on ritual that complements some of the themes raised in *Modernity and its Malcontents*, the volume recently edited by Jean and John Comaroff.

Other contributions are thematic essays or explorations of intra-Muslim relations in particular countries. John Hunwick situates the "sudanic" belt into the context of the wider Muslim world of the twentieth century, focusing on a broad range of individual and institutional contacts. He suggests, with the historian's sense of the past as prelude, that the trend toward the globalization of Islamic contacts and knowledge will not lead to a homogenization of Muslim beliefs and practices in the region. Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im also focuses on the societies on the vast southern edge of the Sahara in an essay concerned with human rights. An-Na'im reminds us that the sheer diversity of the Muslim cultural systems in the region create a complex context in which the struggle for human rights occurs locally. Muhammad Mahmoud, Tomas Gerholm, and George Joffe provide overviews of the activities of Muslim groups in the Sudan, Egypt, and the Maghrib, respectively. The most instructive comment appears in Gerholm's essay, in which he reminds us that the majority of Muslims, "the mainstreamers" as he calls them, are not directly engaged by the arguments of any of the diverse Muslim movements currently competing for their loyalties in contemporary Egypt.

The volume includes a thematic introductory essay by Eva Evers Rosander and a concluding analysis focused on the rise of Islamism by David Westerlund. Both stress the activism and creativity of the Islamists, noting that "reformers" are constructing new types of Muslim society in their invocation of divine mandates from the Qur'an and sunna. Westerlund probes the possible causes for the emergence of Islamism, and quite convincingly moves beyond presumptions of economic and political discontent to underline the efforts taken by Islamists to attract followers to their cause. Rosander focuses on contemporary Muslim discourse and the construction of authority in which groups strive to root themselves in a "legitimate" Muslim "center" and castigate their opponents as occupying a "morally inferior" "margin." Her essay powerfully underlines the implications of Islamism for Africa. Even if, as Gerholm notes for Egypt, most African Muslims are mainstreamers, encounters between

Islamists and other Muslim leaders are producing new configurations that will shape relations of domination/subordination in specific contexts.

This volume enhances our understanding of intra-Muslim relations in contemporary Africa. Occasionally, the focus on two currents, Sufism and Islamism, belies the evidence presented in the essays that Sufism is not the only alternative to Islamism in contemporary discourse. While Rosander and Westerlund, following the lead of Andezian, acknowledge that gender relations are significant, this theme is not as fully elaborated as it deserves. Finally, except for the analysis of the Qur'an translation by Lacunza-Balda and occasional references in other essays, the writings of the Muslim protagonists are not engaged. Nevertheless, this volume deserves a wide readership. Specialists will find worthwhile contributions in their particular fields and generalists may read this volume with confidence that the authors are discussing important issues pertaining to the emergence of Islamism in Africa.

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**The African Novel in English: An Introduction, M. Keith Booker. Portsmouth: Heinemann. 1998 227 pp. \$24.00 paper.**

**Francophone African Women Writers: Destroying the Emptiness of Silence, Irene Assiba D'Almeida. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1994. 222pp. 34.95 cloth.**

After giving an introduction on how to read the African Novel, Keith Booker gives a brief historical survey of the ways in which postcolonial theorists have engaged with African literature. Booker has chapters on important African texts and their authors and the countries they come from with a brief overview of that country's history. Chinua Achebe, Buchi Emecheta, Ayi Kwei Armah, Ama Ata Aidoo, Nadine Gordimer, Alex La Guma, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Tsitsi Dangeremba are some of the writers whose texts and historical location are included in this book.

Even in its title, Booker's text makes no tall claims about bringing additional information to our scholarly understanding of African literature. His introduction will provide an intelligent undergraduate with a historical and political background of the African novels they are reading in class without having to do additional research elsewhere. Perhaps as a teaching tool this oversimplification is a bit too convenient, for this encourages students not to go to the library since it provides sketchy but nonetheless excellent socio-historical information. Booker quite rightly cautions that teaching African literature "requires constant vigilance and, in many cases, radical reformulation of lifelong habits of reading." The problem, in my opinion, is that he encourages such reading habits by giving a rather skimpy and predictable analysis of the various texts he chooses. I do want to reiterate however, that as a point of inception, this book will become a very useful tool for teachers of African literature in this country simply because

Booker makes it unnecessary to consult other information and does chart the sequence of criticisms offered by other critics.

Booker's style is direct and simple, and therefore quite appealing to teachers engaged in representing African literature to an audience of students. His selection seems curious, for even as he includes some of the people taught most as African literati in the American academy, the exclusions are rather glaring. Wole Soyinka is prominent among the exclusions. It is true, however, that he does give information about Nigeria and Achebe, but it seems that he favors one inclusion and not the other though he never states why. The Maghreb, though as much a part of Africa as Southern Africa, is also left out.

I particularly like Booker's inclusion of Tsitsi Dangeremba's text *Nervous Conditions*, for she is one of the new women's voices from Africa, but again, the exclusion of Bessie Head is notable. In addition, he does not question the political significance of how the West has valorized Nadine Gordimer in the classroom and the academy in general, a study much needed, but assumes that indeed one must perpetuate a rather problematic area of South African literary discourse. Again, as in other areas, he does not offer any new thought or analysis of Gordimer, simply paraphrasing Burger's *Daughter* without saying why that is necessary. This kind of critical text does not illuminate further any area of African discourse but rather charts it. However, we cannot fault Booker because what he does is useful. Indeed, the first two chapters seem to suggest a critic who is not only very thoughtful about texts but who has spent considerable time learning and no doubt teaching the authors and texts mentioned here. It is clear that Booker's knowledge about colonial and post-colonial discourse in Africa is considerable. My question then is why does he not include his students at the same level of sophistication in the following chapters that we know he has from the first two?

Irene D'Almeida, on the other hand, divides her book differently, not with authors but rather with ideas. The three chapters on women's discovery of the self through autobiographical writing, through a disclosure of family life, and through criticizing society's intervention in women's lives, are important points of beginning an in-depth analysis of Francophone African Writers. The introduction engages her own analysis with the writing of other feminist critics of African literature and provides an excellent survey of the problematic issues that this criticism raises.

D'Almeida's book is startling in its honesty and scope. She brings to the reader's attention a very specific way of reading Francophone African women writers. Her focus on what she calls "destroying the emptiness of silence" is especially interesting since Minh-ha critiqued Western feminists for assuming that the "silence" of third world women was indeed empty and could be filled by Western feminist discourse. I was particularly pleased to read D'Almeida's book, for it afforded the opportunity to look at it very closely. She brings to this book a thorough knowledge of Francophone African women's texts and a considerable sympathy for the plight of women as illuminated by such writers as Nafissatou Diallo, Ken Bugul, Andree Blouin, Claixthe Beyala, Angele Rawiri, Werewere Liking, Aminata Sow Fall, and Veronique Tadjo. This book will bring to the Anglophone world information which was previously elusive.

D'Almeida's book brings Francophone women into the discourse of third world feminism as instigators and subjects. Silence and the silencing of women, and indeed the breaking free from that imposed silence, the main concern of her book, is very thoughtfully elaborated within

the contexts of the chosen texts. She obviously has a thorough knowledge of Francophone women writers and explains her selection of authors and texts meticulously. D'Almeida's book is very enjoyable. She is direct and clear and never leaves her reader in a quandary if they have not read all the Francophone Women's texts that are the concern of her book.

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