Images and Empires: Visuality in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa. Paul Landau and Deborah Kaspin, eds. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002. 380 pp.

Instructors teaching about African history and society have long wrestled with the stereotypical images of Africa engrained in the heads of their students. This collection of essays, originally presented at a conference at Yale in 1997, offer a number of creative ways to analyze and read images constructed by Africans and Europeans about one another. Gravesites, comic books, anti-colonial cartoons, photography, and wily ethnographic performers are among the subjects covered. This well-written book manages to evade many of the pitfalls of conference compilations and contains information that would be quite useful for those teaching graduate and upper-level undergraduates.

The introduction by Paul Landau is a thoughtful and often daring overview of images in and of Africa. He rightfully notes the chaotic evolution of the series of images of Africa developed by a wide range of travelers, writers, advertisers, and governments based in Europe. Photographs of "native types" allowed governments and foreigners to construct and classify labels, ethnic or otherwise, on Africans while eliminating the individual context of photographic subjects themselves. Thankfully he goes much further by noting how indigenous artists and audiences created their own visual commentary on the colonial experience and appropriated imported pictures and genres for their own ends. One of the most fruitful areas Landau opens up is the complicated ways representations were made, read, and altered in a colonial context. The author notes, "Every unit of meaning, and not just every image, is a public crossroads of histories of interpretation" (16). The rest of the essays pursue the idea of images as a meeting point where widely different and even contradictory social meanings might be placed into visual representations crafted by or of Africans.

In a collection as rich as this one, it is hard to choose certain contributions to highlight. Robert Gordon's essay on Bushmen and film is a fascinating examination of how Africans might manipulate their role of providing stereotypical images of "authentic" Africa for European mass consumption. Governments exaggerated the possible ramifications of film-viewing on African audiences. Some Bushmen themselves, faced with an increasingly harsh set of impositions from the South African government, gleaned both merchandise and cultural influences from the long train of visiting filmmakers while self-consciously performing the "wild" and "primitive" representations that documentary makers wished to capture even though these practices had increasingly vanished in their everyday lives. Tourist culture, far from keeping Bushmen forever pinned in a timeless ethnographic present that only existed in the minds of Europeans, allowed them to comment and gain influence on their contemporary marginal position.

Paul Ben-Amos Girshick offers a look at a group of nineteenth-century artists in the pre-colonial state of Benin (Nigeria) that overturned many of conventions of art to comment on local political and social tensions. *Omada*, young male servants to the king, produced works that parodied royal art and criticized the ominous shadow of increasing British power in the region. *Omada* were placed in a position where they were marginal figures as individuals yet intimately close to the center of power. They could act as 'gatekeepers' who could open or close access to the king to individuals far more respectable than the *omada* themselves. Kings in *omada* art might appear as secondary rather than dominant figures, and Europeans often appear as drunk and oafish buffoons in ways that highlight local views about their

unattractiveness. This piece is a valuable antidote to readers who might expect unchanging and monolithic traditions in royal art.

Eric Gable compares a Portuguese official's obsessive documentation of female scarification among Manjaco people in Guinea-Bissau with Manjaco statues of Europeans. African chiefs decided to innovate an old tradition of abstractly-formed statutes with a much more realist set of statues of Portuguese administrators and traders. Both trends articulate cultural concerns during the 1940s and 1950s when state power expanded in the region. Administrators sought out a supposedly vanishing authentic Manjaco culture by photographing women whilst damning men in European dress as "bad copies" just as they tried to prop up chiefs as "traditional" leaders. At the same time, chiefs and their families sought out individual artists known for carving posts in honor of a man's ascent to adult responsibilities. Young men needed to master colonial technologies of power and influence, Gable contends, that were embodied in the statues. The construction of tradition thus influenced indigenous and foreign visual representations in the region.

Other pieces in this collection deserve far more attention than space available in this review. Hudita Nura Mustafa explores relationships Dakar people make between the trapping of modernity and global circulation with individual selfhood and group identity through photographs. Nancy Rose Hunt takes a characteristically cultural turn with her genealogy of Congolese comic strips and images of the Belgian icon of Tintin. Mission-educated Africans, settlers, Catholic priests, and others produced comic art that could reveal rivalries between ethnic identities, brute caricatures of Africans, or more recent pieces that parody teachers and officials.

All in all, every selection here provokes thought and deserves a reading – a rarity for this sort of publication. The authors and editors are to be commended for the book's excellent design and its cohesiveness.

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