

in Nigeria and abroad prior to assuming their kingly positions. This challenged the reductive gaze of traditional ethnography, which places its subjects frozen in a “timeless” and unchanging culture, and engaged the viewer in a conversation between distant and more recent pasts, and their intersection in the present.

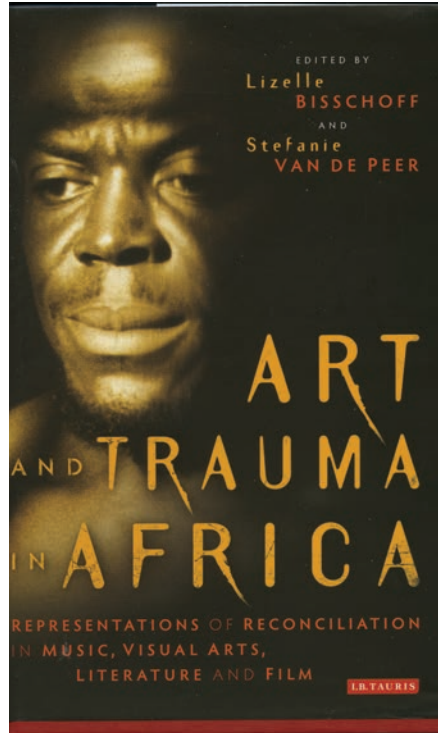
Echoing the tension between tradition and modernity within the photographs, the exhibition navigated a delicate balance between presenting Osodi as a contemporary artist while also delving into the historical by displaying ceremonial robes and beaded regalia. These objects were presented as works of art with singular artistic merit; however, once their symbolic meaning was revealed in the wall captions, they became an entryway into the kingdoms’ ancient customs and cultural beliefs. The temptation of seeing the photographs as worlds of make-believe was thereby dispelled.

All together it was a formal affair and a very colorful one; each photograph an immersion into a bright environment that revealed the way in which architectural spaces and regalia inscribed the position and power of the monarch. More than a collection of portraits, this exhibition, by emphasizing context, gave a rare and intimate glimpse of the royal palaces. To students of African culture, the photographs were an invaluable source of information about the material culture of these monarchies and histories of global trading. The many photographic portraits of previous monarchs that adorned the walls of the palaces, and the photographs of past jubilees embedded in the ceremonial robes, reveal the layered role of photography in anchoring the historical legitimacy of the monarchies. One could easily imagine Osodi’s portraits hanging on these palaces’ walls!

The Newark museum is located in a community with a large population of African American who are ethnically and religiously diverse. This exhibition, which aimed to capture the wide breadth of Osodi’s photographic project, provided an unique opportunity for those of “Nigerian” descent to not only delve into their cultural heritage but also to be witness to the diversity and richness of its contemporary manifestations. More broadly, it dispelled the common idea of a monolithic Nigeria, shed light on the multiplicity of the rulers and ethnicities that continue to shape it to this day.

ISABEL STAINOW WILCOX completed her Master of Art History at Hunter College and continued her postgraduate studies at the Graduate Center, New York. She currently writes a blog on African contemporary art (www.happeningafrica.com). isabel.wilcox@gmail.com

book review



Art and Trauma in Africa: Representations of Reconciliation in Music, Visual Arts, Literature, and Film

Edited by Lizelle Bisschoff and Stefanie Van de Peer

London: I.B. Tauris, 2013. 264 pages, 20 b/w illustrations, bibliography, discography, filmography, index. £68, \$95, cloth

reviewed by Fiona Siegenthaler

Art and Trauma in Africa, edited by the film scholars and co-directors of the Africa in Motion (AiM) Film Festival, Lizelle Bisschoff and Stefanie Van de Peer, is the first book to look exclusively at art and trauma in African contexts.

It consists of a foreword by South African art and social sciences scholar Jacqueline Maingard, the editors’ introduction, and four main sections structured along the genres of music, visual art, literature, and film, each covered in three to four essays. A well-compiled bibliography, discography, filmography, and an index conclude the book.

Foreword and introduction outline recent and older discussions about trauma and representation such as non-representability of subjective experiences and atrocity, the ambiguity of witnessing and remembering, the

ambivalence of an observer/art audiences between empathy and voyeurism, and the difficult relationship between “ethics, poetics and politics” (p. 4).

The editors do not offer an actual definition of trauma and reconciliation, which is both a weakness and an advantage for the book. On the one hand, the essays do not always relate to trauma as such. The essay by Albert O Oikelome on hip hop as a tool for conflict resolution in the Niger Delta, for instance, makes a case for art as a potentially preventive measure against future conflicts, but he remains vague in terms of how art may help to come to terms with past atrocities.

On the other hand, the editors’ unspecific notion of trauma allows for contributions that barely use these terms but nevertheless lead into the center of the subjective and cultural complexities related to this topic. Stefanie Alisch and Nadine Siegert accomplish this diligently and convincingly in their essay on Angolan Kuduro music and dance, showing that trauma and healing often defy representation by the arts. Instead, remembering a violent experience always has a bodily dimension to it; and so has the embodied emancipation from it through music and dance. Kuduro, according to the authors, is a vital shared cultural performance in which individuals and collectives negotiate trauma and reconciliation “in disguise” (p. 64).

The necessity to speak about and visually represent traumatic events that comes with widespread emphasis on public witnessing as mode of reconciliation is ambivalent. Images can empower victims to create their own representation, but they can also victimize individuals and groups through the voyeuristic gaze and narrative of another. This tension between the impossibility and inevitability of representing trauma is reflected in several essays of the volume. John Masterson, for instance, deconstructs colonial stereotypes as they continue in Western representation of traumatizing events in Africa, while Frank Möller and Rafiki Ubaldo discuss this ambivalence more thoroughly. By asking who makes images with what purposes and for whom, they point to the core of the politics of images and their pertinence regarding the complexity of atrocity, involving perpetrators and victims and the detached but not disinterested observer from abroad. They reflect on the different modes in which photography is used to document genocides, asking for the conditions for empathy, understanding, or agentic reaction within the viewers. They thereby emphasize the potential of photographs when produced by local actors for local actors in everyday life, for instance as media for commemoration of deceased family members or even to help orphaned children in search of their biography.

Memory as a double-edged sword is another recurring topic in the volume. To remember may ensure learning and understanding, but it can also trigger feelings of rage and revenge. Furthermore, memory is contested and often divided between a dominant national and many personal narratives. Moulay Driss El Maarouf's essay reflects this ambiguity with regard to music festivals in the aftermath of terrorist attacks in Morocco. While such events contribute to a kind of collective catharsis and possibly bring communal healing and reconciliation to a diverse traumatized population, they also provide those in political and economic power a platform for counter-terror spectacles.

The tension between the construction of national remembrance and individual memories is a major theme in the essays dealing with artists' reactions to the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). In this political process, "truth" has proven to be a highly contested notion, since every witness experiences and narrates the events differently. According to the editors, art has the potential to disclose and explore the constructed nature of testimony and dominant trauma narratives. Robyn Leslie's essay on the reception of the TRC in contemporary South African literature supports this claim. Examining the production of a dominant narrative through the TRC that made it difficult to talk about particular forms of atrocities excluded from the official post-apartheid discourse, Leslie shows how South African authors Jane Taylor and Antjie Krog complicate the "official narrative" of the TRC in their work by adopting a literary "creative narrative." They bring to light the highly subjective side of remembering and suffering that stands in conflict with the official discourse. Sarah Longair in turn elaborates on how post-apartheid curatorial projects try to pay attention to these plural narratives such as the permanent exhibit "Number Four," which since 2004 has been focusing on a notorious apartheid prison in the heart of Johannesburg. As a part of the new Constitutional Court precinct, its exhibitions allow for various narratives, giving space to individual ways of remembering and testifying as opposed to a single national "synthesised memory" (p. 118). Cara Moyer-Duncan follows a similar argument in her discussion of filmmakers Sechaba Morojele and Norman Maake, who include narratives in their work that do not fit into the official reconciliation agenda, showing the deep wounds that remain in parts of the black population without compensation.

Many essays also talk of the lack of narrative, of gaps and inconsistencies highlighting the traumatic impact of experiences of violence, and how they reflect in works of art. Tobias Robert Klein analyses two West African novels and shows how the authors use literary

strategies, techniques, tropes and verbal traditions to write about the ambiguities of memory, subjective experience and the non-verbal aspects of trauma. Similarly, Lizelle Bisschoff convincingly shows in her film analysis of *The Night of Truth* (2004) how fiction, metaphor, and allegory—all constituting essential parts of African oral tradition and teaching—can help as models to talk about existing conflicts and possible solutions toward reconciliation.

Outstanding is Stefanie Van de Peer's chapter on Leila Kilani's documentary film *Our Forbidden Places* (2008) that reflects the trauma of the Moroccan "years of lead" and generational differences in dealing with it. The film is the ideal choice to discuss the potential of images—and film in particular—to respectfully convey situations, sentiments, and intersubjective relationships through veiling, non-verbal elements, silence, and gaps. Even conscious amnesia, self-censorship, and refusal to learn the "truth" become things that can be understood through film, helping the viewer to get an idea of the deep scars trauma leaves behind in individuals, families, and entire societies without denuding the filmed subjects. A particular strength of the film observed by Van de Peer is that the filmmaker is in command of an enormous range of possibilities to reflect her own role in the production of representation.

The book concentrates on representation and therefore mainly on literature, music lyrics, and image-based art and purposefully (but without explanation) excludes dance and theater, which are both established means of trauma therapy. This is certainly due to the editors' declared purpose to focus on art *as* therapy rather than on art *in* therapy. While this is legitimate considering the richness of this book, non-representational performative art forms seem to relate in a unique way to (infringed) bodies, experiences, and thus lives of trauma victims, perhaps *because* they tend to emphasize agency and not representation. However, the essays by Amy Schwartzott and Chérie Rivers underscore the importance also of visual art when it contributes to local agency rather than foreign representation. Schwartzott presents *Transformação de Armas em Enxadas*, an initiative that recycles weapons into art pieces as a means of disarming post-civil-war Mozambique and supporting local economic structures. Weapons thus adopt new functions and take on new aesthetic value. Rivers finally shows how Petna Ndaliko Katondolo's film work and cultural engagement serve as a tool for peace-making and potential healing in Congo. Katondolo explores film as a "commemorative, generative and regenerative" medium (p. 254), using its potential to represent narratives of atrocity, trigger discussion in the affected audiences, and in turn involve afflicted individuals into new productions, thereby promoting individual and communal agency as a mode of healing.

Each essay in *Art and Trauma in Africa* contributes an enriching, different perspective on the topic, thus demonstrating the variety of approaches possible when dealing with art and trauma in Africa. Most importantly, the book focuses on local creativity and modes of coping with trauma. The book is a vital contribution towards decolonizing trauma studies, emphasizing not only the need to take on an Afrocentric perspective but also acknowledge art as an important space where human existence and agency are at play. The book is a promising incentive to invigorate and deepen future research about art and trauma more firmly in epistemological and ontological terms peculiar to African cultural practices and knowledge traditions, thus offering a first step towards counteracting the dominance of Western perspectives and epistemologies in trauma studies.

All in all, the book constitutes an excellent first publication on art and representation of trauma and reconciliation in Africa. Although new books and essays on decolonizing trauma studies have been published in the meantime, it is still the only one bringing art and trauma studies in Africa together. It offers engaging readings to novices as well as experts interested in the workings of visual art, music, literature, and film in the context of human atrocities and trauma in Africa. While it provides only little theoretical reflection with regard to what an Afrocentric perspective and representation exactly entails, the book is a major contribution to the young agenda of decolonizing trauma studies. Its major merit lies in its interest to understand and show how contemporary societies find individual and collective modes of dealing with trauma and reconciliation within and beyond representation.

FIONA SIEGENTHALER is a senior lecturer and postdoc researcher at the Chair of Social Anthropology, University of Basel, and a research associate at the Center for Visual Identities, Art, and Design, University of Johannesburg. Fiona.Siegenthaler@unibas.ch