

Jaji, Tsitsi E. *Africa in Stereo: Modernism, Music and Pan-African Solidarity*. New York, NY: Oxford UP, 2014. 272 pp. ISBN 978-0-19-993639-7.

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The book *Africa in Stereo* offers a compelling contribution to African Studies in this scholarly well-researched and well-written study to answer a fundamental question the author, Tsitsi E. Jaji, posed herself while a music student in the United States about the cultural importance of the black diasporic music, literary works and other forms of media that have and still circulates within Africa. The study contends that it is specifically this circulation that helped to define the African continent and contributed to a sense of solidarity felt by Africans towards African-Americans and Afro-Caribbeans and ultimately informed what it means to be “modern” in Africa today.

Jaji establishes in the first chapter of the book the theoretical basis of the study by looking principally first at the conceptual, relatable component of solidarity—transnational black solidarity—signified in various Pan-African cultural representations. Secondly she takes up modernism—as conceived in historical writing, films, magazines by African artists who have contributed to the idea of how to be modern on the continent and finally she considers the media—printed media, recordings, and performances—that facilitates diasporic music to transmit and anchor the global context of interconnectedness in the Black Atlantic and allow modernist sensibilities on the continent. Consequently, the author suggests that these interactions and global feeling of solidarity they create, build a sort of cultural state in which possible modern practices and methods facilitate in Africa what Jaji calls “stereomodernism”. The study looks at this cultural and political phenomenon and limits itself in three localized African cultural spaces: South Africa, Ghana, and Senegal.

The generic theme of stereomodernism informs the essence of the responses the book tries to bring out in all the subsequent five chapters. *Africa in stereo* underlines in the second chapter—entitled Sight Reading—Jaji’s articulation of modernity within its musical influences in the context of trans-Atlantic Black cultural exchanges, from which Pan-Africanism sprang out on both sides of the Black Atlantic. This argument rests on various cultural artifacts, influenced by African-American musical aesthetic and experiences, which the author offers as evidence especially in South Africa where musical transcriptions of freedom by early South African intellectuals, at the beginning

of the twentieth century, presented for them a vision of a modernist and sophisticated life. The chapter elaborates further, that the transcriptions and notation they engaged in using both English and local South-African languages were not just creative cultural works. They were as well—as exemplified especially by the works of John L. Dube and his wife Nokutela Dube, Charlotte M. Maxeke and Solomon T. Plaatje—a forging voice for a nationalist process and agenda within a political environment of black-consciousness movement in a land of racial expropriation and colonization.

The third chapter, “Négritude Musicology: Poetry, Performance, and Statecraft in Senegal” looks closely at the impact of jazz and other diasporic music not only on an important cultural, intellectual and political figure of Senegal, Léopold Sédar Senghor, but also on his formulation of Négritude poetics. Jaji tries to elucidate the complexity of the transnational dimension of Senghorian interest as shown in his writings about jazz and, as she consequently argues, with quite a lot of merit, for his African-American and African critics to reconsider their positions on Négritude that neglected this rather essential aspect of Senghor’s poetic creation. Jaji considers also in her Négritude musicology analysis, the importance of the World Festival of Negro Arts held in Dakar in 1966, probably Senegal’s most remembered Pan-African cultural event, that encapsulated Senghor’s essential concept of l’âme noire (The black soul) and actualized the centrality of music in the aesthetics of Négritude’s poetry. The author contends in this chapter that “...so the poem on the page was seen as a limited sketch of a collaborative stereomodernist event that Senghor imagined as being best illustrated through music. A fuller picture was projected in grand style in 1966” (p.87).

Chapter four, “What Women Want: selling Hi-Fi in Consumer Magazines and Film” delves in a cultural media’s new trend that began to illustrate women in consumer pictorial magazines, films, and other print publishing media especially after the second World War to project a sense of glamor, cosmopolitanism, and consumerism. As consumers women were featured and presented glamorously in these media along with advertisements representing various audio appliances and consumer goods which created for the reading audience—what Jaji calls “sheen reading”—a sense of desire in all that was “new”, a sort of a process towards an African consumptive modernity. The author explains further in the chapter the popularity and significance of *Ebony* magazine in Black America’s consumerism and visions of modernity and relates it to the media phenomenon on the continent especially in two magazines, the South Africa’s *Zonke!* and *Bingo*, the Francophone West African magazine popularized in Senegal starting in the 1950s. Jaji asserts that both of these magazines did not really carry the torch for the female agency but they projected women through a mediatic sense of “sheen of modernity” (p. 21) that revealed, however, their contrasted states based on lived experiences as gendered subjects in a world of apartheid and colonialism.

The fifth chapter, entitled “Soul to Soul: Echolocating Histories of Slavery and Freedom from Ghana” establishes as its theoretical basis the “echo” phenomenon and its function to resonate in and from specific Ghana’s memorial structural spaces

reminiscent of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The Black diaspora, as a historical space and a product of the Middle Passage's narratives, is at the center of this chapter as it looks specifically at the work of two Ghanaian poets—Kofi Anyidoho, Kwadwo Opoku-Agyemang and a Ghanaian resident Barbadian poet Kamau Brathwaite. The author discusses mainly the importance of the African perspective of these poets and points especially at Anyidoho's and Opoku-Agyemang's work characterized by an engaging poetic and historical portrayal of the slave trade memorial sites in Ghana. Jaji contends however that Brathwaite's work, as an Afro-Caribbean in Ghana, expands the vision of the Black Atlantic in contextual poetic resonances and integrates the African oral tradition in Brathwaite's formulation of the notion of "nation language". And thus, the chapter considers logically the stereomodernist intersection of what these three poets bring in the African diaspora-continental relations and what other works—as represented first by the film *Soul to Soul* documenting a 1971 "return to Africa" musical performance by various African American artists in Accra and secondly by literary writings and personal reminiscences produced by different authors in such works as—Ama Ata Aidoo's *Dilemma of a Ghost* (1965), Maya Angelou's *All God's Children Need Travelling Shoes* (1986) and Saidiya Hartman's *Lose Your Mother* (2007). Through these documentaries, writings and musical performances, Jaji demonstrates what she calls: "...a process of Black Atlantic echolocation where repetitions of specific rituals of commemoration offer a framework for successive generations of diasporans and Ghanaians to stage encounters on the ground of traumatic history and thus to work out their relation to place, time and belonging" (p 148).

The sixth and last chapter, "Pirates Choice: Hacking into (Post-) Pan-African Futures" the author discusses initially as in earlier chapters the theoretical foundation of piracy—a practice of illegal copying and redistributing cultural materials—as a logic at work in several expressive documents that offer other Pan-African futures and alternative archiving of what jaji calls "counter-histories" (p 193). The chapter looks—through the lenses of the pirate logic—at how the transnational Black solidarity is represented in three movies—*Camp de Thiayore* (1987) and *Ça Twiste à Popenguine* (1992) by two Senegalese film directors, Ousmane Sembene and Moussa Sene Absa and in *The Last Angel of History* (1987) by the Ghanaian-British film maker John Akomfrah who tries to connect with a viewing public interested in Afro-futurism. Jaji presents also in the same line of inquiry several other recent works that utilize diasporic music, especially blues, to signify as well the notion of transnational solidarity—as in the novel—*Rue Felix-Faure* by the Senegalese feminist novelist Ken Bugul. The chapter ends by portraying the Pan-African Space Station, a South African web-based radio project, created in 2008 by two individuals—Neo Muyanga and Ntone Edjabe—who are known in Africa as "Heliocentrics". The site beams out live concerts, accepts audience-based programming, and uses, to connect with its Pan-African audience, all sort of broadcastable media and technologies which prompted Jaji to affirm that, "I would

argue that Pan-African Space Station presents itself and operates in many respects as a pirate radio station” (p. 231).

*Africa in Stereo* ends with an epilogue in which the author reminisces about the idea of Pan-Africanism as a historical movement that contributed to political consciousness of diasporan and continental Africans in their fight against colonialism, racism, and later apartheid and as such facilitated the trans-Atlantic solidarity between the continent and the diaspora. But the author contends that in today’s Africa Pan-Africanism is failing to establish the influential solidarity of the past especially within the continent’s major political organs as the African Union (AU) and, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) before it, that have failed the Africans in their struggle against political abuses and corruption within the continent.

Jaji concludes the book by reminding the reader that despite all the African solidarity shortcomings and human tragedies that have plagued the continent—as exemplified by the Rwandan Genocide or the Black South African’s xenophobia—there is however some consolation as presented in a penetrating and conscious-raising poetic reflections by the South African writer Keorapetse Kgositsile whose citation of an African proverb in his poem ”Race: What Time Is It?” celebrates rather humorously the human solidarity on the continent:

Somewhere on this continent  
the voice of the ancients warns  
that those who shit on the road  
will meet flies on their way back (p.243)