

Shaykh Hamallah on his community – the latter chapter considers the decline and later revitalization of the Tijaniyya.

In the second part, entitled ‘Authority’, the focus is on shifts in authority and the contemporary configuration of religious practice in Nioro. The four chapters offer valuable insights and understandings through the prism of contemporary Islam. Chapter 5 discusses Islamic esoteric practices and the centrality of the knowledge and use of such practices, as well as different positions towards such knowledge among local Muslims. Chapter 6 discusses the development of what Soares (and others) have termed ‘the prayer economy’, namely the exchange of gifts for blessings, prayers and intercession with God. Here, as in the previous chapter, the role and position of the various Sufi leaders is crucial. In the next chapter the contemporary critics of the Sufi leaders and Sufism *per se* – the ‘reformists’ – and their agenda are discussed. Chapter 8 highlights the impact of the secular state and the development of a ‘new’ public sphere, both on the national and in particular on the local level, especially in relationship to the existing religious and social space. The concluding chapter is a well-balanced summary and discussion of the central arguments and insights of the book, and stands as an informative text by itself.

Soares’s book is a valuable companion to earlier studies of Sufism and Islam in West Africa. The novelty of the book lies in its depth of scholarship and deep understanding of past and present societal and religious changes. Soares’s investigations into hierarchy and charisma, in addition to the ‘prayer economy’ and the changing relationship between different Muslim groups and their leaders, place his work at the forefront of academic research on Muslim societies in West Africa.

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PATRICK ATUOBI, ANTHONY OBENG BOAMAH AND SJAAK VAN DER GEEST (eds), *Life, Love and Death: conversations with six elders in Kwahu-Tafo, Ghana*. Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis (pb €7.50–978 90558 9261 7). 2005, 56 pp.

In Twi an elder is called *panyin*. This honorary title refers to somebody who ‘has grown’ not only in years, but also through the accumulation of experience and wisdom. Ideally an *panyin*, someone no longer working and travelling, stays at home, looks after the welfare of his/her family, mediates in conflicts, and advises younger generations. In this beautiful booklet Patrick Atuobi, Anthony Obeng Boamah and Sjaak van der Geest present fragments of conversations they conducted with six elders in southern Ghana from 1994 to 2000. These elders, four men and two women, all born early in the twentieth century, had worked as (cocoa) farmers, traders, clerks, storekeepers and palace attendants. Although the editors acknowledge that the lives of elders in Kwahu-Tafo were not as ‘rosy’ as the idealized notion of *panyin* implies, the collection highlights ‘the beauty of old age’ by selecting the ‘most touching pronouncements’ (p. 2) on a series of issues. Themes include growing old, wisdom and experience, blessing and cursing, respect and reciprocity, money and poverty, love and friendship, building a house, death and funerals. The reader gains a better understanding of the experience of old age, including an unusually frank discussion of male and female sexuality. There are hints on the ambivalence of elderhood: ‘I know many proverbs, but [young] people do not

come to learn them' (p. 24). The shortcoming of this elegant meditation on growing old is its slowness. Because the editors did not include their questions, it is not always clear what triggered the elders' elaborations. Aside from the two-page introduction, I would have welcomed more historical context and interpretation. I wanted to hear more about these elders' lives. How have the historical transformations they witnessed affected their understanding of elderhood? These interview excerpts remain compelling and evocative, especially for a reader familiar with southern Ghana.

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KEVIN A. YELVINGTON (ed.), *Afro-Atlantic Dialogues: anthropology in the diaspora*. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press (pb \$34.95–978 19306 1846 6). Oxford: James Currey (pb £18.95–978 08525 5978 9). 2006, 502 pp.

*Afro-Atlantic Dialogues* will remain a landmark in the fields of research related to the African diaspora. This book emerges from a seminar convened by Kevin A. Yelvington, 'From Africa to the Americas: new directions in Afro-American anthropology' (1999). The finished volume presents twelve articles which dialogue with one another, giving an overall sense of great coherence. In the introduction, Yelvington sets the stage for the challenges met by the contributors. Beyond the characteristic trends of the study of the African diaspora in the New World, identified as 'diachronic orientation' and 'dialectical relationship', Yelvington proposes a new encompassing approach called 'dialogic'. In a nutshell, dialogic entails 'a critical concern with the historical fashioning of anthropology's categories' and simultaneously an insistence on the 'processes of multiparty interaction in the creation and transformation through history of determined material social relationships' (p. 4). This double process allows a critical dialogue between discourse and consciousness: that is, an approach informed by the historical and social context of production of the discipline, the power inequities it generated, and the politics of its reception. The adoption of this critical perspective forces a reconsideration of the whole question of cultural origins, to which each author offers a significant contribution.

Part 1, 'Critical histories of Afro-Americanist anthropologies', opens with Yelvington's chapter. Here the author questions the sources of Melville Herskovits's thought and unveils his multiple connections with other scholars who were crucial in shaping the paradigms, objects and social *milieu* of anthropology. In Chapter 3 Sally Price reviews the contextual changes in the reception and valuation of the arts of the African diaspora across the world. Hers is a plea for a conscientious scholarship, backed by traceable references and sources as minimal requirements for honest interpretations. This chapter is illustrated by nine colour photographs of various artworks. Richard Price, in Chapter 4, offers a remarkable reflection on the 'creolization model' he first presented with Sidney W. Mintz in 1976. The politics of reception and the changing contexts of interpretation are thoroughly scrutinized.

Part 2, 'Dialogues in practice', begins with J. Lorand Matory's chapter. He reviews a series of analytic metaphors used by anthropologists and Afro-Americanists, while the 'dialogue metaphor' is given one of its best illustrations. Matory's insistence on the constant interaction and the mutual shaping between Africa and Afro-America aims to resituate Africa as a major actor