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## Book Reviews

Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War and the Roots of Terror*, New York: Pantheon Books; Dakar: CODESRIA, 2004, xii+304pp, US\$24 (ISBN 0-375-42285-4).

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At a recent dinner for White House correspondents, George W. Bush joked that many people criticised his record in handling the economy, but few seemed to notice what his administration had done for the book publishing industry. Bush was referring to the long and still growing list of bestsellers in the US that focus on his dubious war on terrorism and the imbroglio in Iraq.

The bestseller list in the US has been dominated by books on the war on terrorism, especially on the preventive (not pre-emptive) war in Iraq. Most of the books discuss Bush's reasons for attacking Iraq. Some contrast this with his rather lethargic interest in terrorism prior to the September 11 attacks, or the inside scoop of how the Iraq war was orchestrated and executed. Most are authored by Americans for American audiences and are critical of Bush's war.<sup>1</sup> But they all maintain a questionable baseline assumption of America as a 'relatively benign power' that intervenes in the rest of the world only for the better of world safety, peace and freedom.<sup>2</sup>

It is therefore refreshing to have Mahmood Mamdani's study of American foreign policy and the origins of terror. *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim* offers the perspective of a keen African observer and analyst of American foreign policy. The author locates the war on terror historically and demonstrates an awareness of the connection between American foreign policy and terrorism in ways that American authors loath rendering. The book is divided into five chapters with an introduction that conceptualises violence and explains the link between genocide and terrorism. Mamdani sets out to explain 'political events, above all September 11, in the light of political encounters—historically shaped—rather than as the outcome of stubborn

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cultural legacies' (11). He faults US political commentary of September 11, showing how it reflects 'a great power struck by amnesia', a country that acknowledged the epochal significance of the attack but was eager always to take 'it out of the historical and political context' (15).

Chapter one critiques Culture Talk. The second focuses on the Cold War. It shows how the financing of proxy wars that dominated the post-Vietnam era derived valuable lessons from the late-Cold War era of the 1970s. Chapter three uses Afghanistan to illustrate how the lessons that the US learned from Indochina, South Africa and Central America were operationalised by US-sponsored Islamic Jihad movements to fight the Soviet Union, the 'evil empire' as the Reagan Administration put it (13). Chapter four examines the change from covert and proxy operations to an open embrace of political terror as the US attacked Iraq in the Gulf War. Chapter five challenges the US to go beyond its belief in collective punishment, a tendency that it deploys with arrogance and impunity. Mamdani convincingly shows that it is from the oppressive acts of collective punishment and collateral damage that potential 'terrorists' are created.

Mamdani's narrative follows an important shift in US foreign policy whose central commitment in the Cold War era was to fight and defeat the 'evil empire' 'by all means necessary'. The first casualty of this policy was nationalism in the third world. The Reagan administration viewed with unjustified trepidation the ascendance of nationalist leaders in the third world and wrongly concluded that most of their movements were Soviet proxies. The US therefore embraced allies like the Unita in Angola, Renamo in Mozambique, the contras in Nicaragua and Mujahideen in Afghanistan to fight back. Mamdani poses the central problematic thus: 'What particular circumstances made it possible for terrorism to be transformed from an ideological tendency into a political force?' (14). The answer, he argues, was the Cold War; terrorism was 'crafted from local raw material' but its 'political tendencies crystallized as strategies to win the Cold War' (14). Movements like Unita are the foremost expressions of terrorism, only that this was our [US] terror.

Thus, Mamdani draws a conceptual distinction between state terror and non-state terror and how political Islam has grown by being politicised by state-approved or sponsored forces. The author shows how from a particular brand of political Islam, the Reagan administration fomented terrorist groups to fight the so-called evil of Soviet Communism in Afghanistan. It is from the remnants of these groups that al-Qaeda was born in 1989 in the town of Khost in Afghanistan. Mamdani further observed that he knows of

no-one who follows Osama bin Laden as a religious or spiritual leader; most follow him as a politician. In this way, Mamdani dismisses as clearly misconceived analyses and analysts—many of whom are influential White House advisors and media commentators—of terrorism who associate its occurrence to some essence intrinsic in Arab culture or Islam.

This critique of essentialism forms the content of chapter one. Here Mamdani takes a critical look at Culture Talk; that brand of thinking prevalent in the West that interprets terrorism as a product of a people's culture. This thinking proceeds by deploying binaries of tradition and modernity and posing them as antithetical to each other. It views the big problem with non-Western societies to be their insidious entrapment in a statist past that determines their perception of and response to modernity brought about courtesy of westernisation. With respect to US foreign policy interests in the post-Cold War era, the most visible proponent of this view is Samuel Huntington, author of the notoriously embarrassing text entitled *The Clash of Civilizations*.<sup>3</sup> In fact, in this text, Huntington was merely popularising an idea of clash of civilisations first articulated by Bernard Lewis in his article 'The Roots of Muslim Rage' first published in *The Atlantic* of September 1990.

In the piece, Lewis makes spurious connection between a certain essence in Muslim cultures and its modern rebellious attitudes. For him, the essence derives from Islam's ancient greatness and the rebellious attitude has something to do with the loss of this greatness. Most Muslims, he avers, blame this loss on the ascendancy and domination of the West in the Muslim house. He argues that western influence has created emancipated women and rebellious children, something that is 'too much' for the Muslim 'to endure'. For Lewis, 'the outbreak of rage against alien, infidel, and incomprehensible forces that had subverted his [Muslim] dominance, disrupted his society, and finally violated the sanctuary of his home' was inevitable.<sup>4</sup> But as Mamdani shows, this article is based on unsustainable generalisations about Islam and Muslim minds that the author repeated in a book whose page proofs were ready when September 11 happened.

The book entitled *What Went Wrong?* is a tome for the right-wing in the US. Of its limited accomplishments, the book has re-invented Lewis's political credentials, bringing him out of retirement and turning him into a key political advisor of the Bush/Cheney war on terror. Lewis is a leading exponent of the view that 'Islam has caused the many ills of Muslim societies'.<sup>5</sup> He is often quoted by Cheney to justify US actions in Iraq. This makes him an apt point of departure for Mamdani's critique of Culture Talk because this Talk is central to US thinking and execution of the war on terror.

For Mamdani, Culture Talk sees non-western cultures in two ways: there are those whose cultures are seen as lagging behind and unable to catch up with modernity (like Africans), and those categorised as resistant and unwilling to catch up (like the Arabs). Lewis's contribution resides in his acknowledgement of diverse trends in Islam, some fundamentalist and others not. He perceives the former as bad while the latter are good. Culture Talk sees good Muslims as 'modern, secular, and westernized' while bad Muslims 'are doctrinal, antimodern, and virulent' (24). Culture Talk concludes that 'good' Muslims need to be rescued from 'bad' Muslims. As Mamdani shows, this reading of Islam is America-centric, and Lewis leaves no doubt of this in his Western vantage point through which he perceives Islam.

Though Mamdani does an excellent job in critiquing Lewis, it is the late Edward Said who thoroughly demolished Lewis's explanation of *What Went Wrong?* and his pretensions to understanding Islam. In a damaging review published in *Harper's Magazine* in July 2002, Said questioned Lewis's credentials as an analyst of Islam beyond Turkey where he undertook his initial research. Harsh judgment? Perhaps. But, like Mamdani, Said showed that Lewis treated Islam as some monolith dominated by a specific fundamentalist tradition characterised by an absence of freedom and an aversion to secularism. Said is scornful of Lewis's recommendation that 'We' in the West can help the good Muslims win their own war against the bad Muslims.<sup>6</sup> But as Mamdani shows, this recommendation accounts for Lewis's attractiveness to the Bush/Cheney axis.

Said, in contrast, poses Islam as a 'series of interpretations that are so divergent' with 'many histories, many peoples, many languages, traditions, schools of interpretation, proliferating developments, disputations, cultures, and countries'.<sup>7</sup> Mamdani pursues this line of argument in chapter one, delving into the history of the different tendencies within Islam. Wondering whether one can in fact speak of Judeo-Christian civilisation over two millennia as Lewis does for Islam, Mamdani proceeds to 'distinguish between fundamentalism as a religious identity and political identities that use a religious idiom, such as political Christianity and political Islam'. These two 'are political identities formed through direct engagement with modern forms of power' (36). It is politicised Islam, not Islam itself, that explains the origins of terror. Mamdani pursues this argument with focus and admirable clarity.

The movements that have instigated political terror are political rather than religious movements. Mamdani refers to them as political Islam, that is, political movements that speak the language of religion. Dismissing the whole notion of Islamic fundamentalism, Mamdani carefully distinguishes between

so-called fundamentalism as a religious identity and a political identity (37). Delving into the history of political Christianity and political Islam, he draws several distinctions between them, especially the fact that Islam was unable to develop a religious hierarchy that paralleled the hierarchy of the state. Thus, while Christian fundamentalism in the US grew in a struggle to capture or control state power, such a phenomenon did not take place in the Islamic world except in Iran (47). One can speak of Christian fundamentalism but for the case of Islam, Mamdani questions the unabashed equation of extremist religious tendencies with political terrorism. On the contrary, he suggests that political Islam grew out of healthy debates within Islam among intellectuals like Mohamed Iqbal, Mohamed Ali Jinnah, Abdul A'al Mawdudi and Sayyid Qutb. For him, our scholarly energy should focus on how state-centred, as opposed to society-centred, political Islam leaped 'from the word to the deed, thereby moving from the intellectual fringe to the mainstream of politics in large parts of the Islamic world' (61). His answer is that 'terrorism is born of a political encounter', and in the case of contemporary terrorism, one must search for its origin in the Cold War encounters.

To demonstrate that terrorism is born of a political encounter, Mamdani locates its history in the late Cold War. Chapters two to four trace the origins of political terror in Cold War US machinations, showing the various lessons the US learned in its encounter in Vietnam and Laos and how these were tested in Congo (later Zaire and now the Democratic Republic of Congo), Angola, and Mozambique before being exported full-blown through Nicaragua to Afghanistan. US military blunders in Vietnam and the successful execution of covert war in Laos are two critical starting points. In Vietnam, the US learned that 'an active press and vigilant congressional oversight were significant obstacles to military effectiveness' (99). When the US misinterpreted the ascending nationalism in the Congo (Zaire), Angola and Mozambique as stooges of the Soviet Union in the 1960s and 1970s, it responded through covert support to anti-nationalist movements. In Congo, mercenaries were hired to eliminate Patrice Lumumba, defeat Congolese nationalism and install the brutal dictator Joseph Mobutu. In Angola, the US supported the Front for the National Liberation of Angola and the Union for the Total Independence of Angola, while in Mozambique, the CIA used apartheid South Africa to sponsor Renamo, Africa's first terrorist movement. The crescendo was the policy of 'constructive engagement' with the apartheid regime in South Africa which actively sponsored Renamo's terror that was brutally unleashed against civilians.

Under Ronald Reagan, US policy shifted from 'containment' of communism to 'rollback', but only after Renamo had tested several of the terror inducing strategies the CIA preferred. 'The hallmark of terror was that it

targeted civilian life: blowing up infrastructure ... destroying health and educational centers, mining paths and fields, kidnapping civilian—particularly children—to press-gang them into recruits’ (91). Thus, what the US has come to term “collateral damage” was not an unfortunate by-product of the war; it was the very point of terrorism’ (91). In Central America, the CIA and Pentagon christened their forms of terrorism as Low Intensity Conflict (LIC) and applied it in support of the contras in Nicaragua. The idea of these terrorist actions shares alarmingly familiar goals with what has become the hallmark of modern conflicts. First, they involved ‘embracing right-wing dictators while targeting left-wing regimes’ (100). Such embrace of dictators reached absurd levels in May 1983 and 1985 when Reagan described the contras and mujahideen as ‘freedom fighters’ and elevated them to ‘moral equivalents of our founding fathers’ (102-3 and 119). Second, the point of LIC was to erode ‘popular confidence in government’ and ‘to bleed [and discredit] the government’ (117). In Nicaragua, US-backed terror turned the election ‘into a referendum on terror’.

... the idea was that if the right dose of terror could be delivered with effectiveness and combined with impunity, it would only be a matter of time before the population was convinced that the only way to end terror was to grant terrorists their political objective: power (117-18).

But how does this explain the transformation of political Islam from an intellectual movement on the fringe to the mainstream of politics? The stage for this transformation was Afghanistan where the US found ‘an opportunity to hand the Soviet Union its own Vietnam’. Working through an alliance between the CIA and Pakistani’s Inter Services Intelligence (ISI), the US created a band of right-wing Islamists variously recruited from Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Indonesia, the US and Britain to fight the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. In what became the Afghan jihad, the US objective was to ‘recruit the most radically anti-communist Islamists to counter Soviet forces’ and supply mujahideen with maximum firepower (126). Using these forces, the US launched its version of jihad against the communists. Its most notable leader in the mid-1980s was Shiekh Abdullah Azzam, Osama bin Laden’s teacher. Azzam professed a love for martyrdom and stated that the objective for the ‘holy war’ was ‘Jihad and the rifle alone: no negotiators, no conferences, no dialogues’. Mamdani’s argument is that the CIA created the Afghan jihad ‘in service of a contemporary political objective’. Through Prince Turki al-Faisal, the head of Saudi intelligence, they recruited Osama bin Laden to lead the jihad. But when the objective of the jihad was over, the spirit of the movement, full with its terrorist outfit and training, did not die. Rather, in 1989, at a meeting in Khost in Afghanistan, bin Laden founded al-Qaeda (the

base) to 'wage a jihad beyond the borders of Afghanistan' (133), thus creating a group independent of the US jihad which soon acquired transnational spread.

If the training of Afghan jihadists was open to all radicals from around the world, the unifying ideology was to achieve extreme hatred of communists. This objective was couched in the broader language of inculcating a sense of potential Islamic revolution in Muslim majority countries. The targets for this training were the madrassas. The training was meant to create 'Islamic guerillas' sufficiently aware of their religious 'duty' and effectively trained to administer terror. It is estimated that 'thirty-five thousands Muslim radicals from forty-three Islamic countries fought for the mujahideen between 1982 and 1992' (137). Is it surprising that 'key leaders of every major terrorist attack ... inevitably turned out to have been veterans of the Afghan war'? (139). What is notable is that though several mujahideen groups waged this US-sponsored private war, effective organisational homogeneity was never attained throughout the Afghan jihad. The CIA pandered to the fissures within Afghan society to achieve its narrow objectives and these fissures continue to haunt Afghanistan to date.

Without official congressional approval and sponsorship of the war, the Afghan jihad was financed through the sale of drugs. The CIA encouraged the growth, production and sale of opium and heroin. The people Reagan had described as the moral equivalent of US founding fathers did the drug dealing as the CIA looked the other way. Most of the drug lords were also leaders of the 'jihad' and were easily chosen because they were opposed to Soviet-imposed leadership in Afghanistan prior to the jihad. The CIA was willing to overlook their record in relation to drugs for the sake of the 'jihad'. Littered with several disparate and often competing groups and with a war fed by an illicit drug trade, Mamdani shows that the withdrawal of the Soviets heralded a new era in Afghanistan, one in which minds had been poisoned and where conditions for civil war were rife. There were those foreign fighters who were not only rootless in Afghanistan but also lacked any future meaningful prospects outside. These rootless people fed an international network of fighters that formed a good recruitment ground for al-Qaeda. As Afghanistan degenerated into civil war which the Taliban won, it metamorphosed into a 'harshly patriarchal rule' targeting women and children. A major consequence of the CIA-backed Afghan jihad was that it created a long lasting war in Afghanistan and created a network of groups that shared 'terror tactics', believed in the 'holy war as a political ideology', and engaged in 'transnational recruitment of fighters' (163). September 11 witnessed the effects of the jihad.

Throughout its Cold War engagements, the US has trampled on almost every nationalist aspiration of most third world countries perceived not to toe the line as regards US preferences. Mamdani interprets the US transition from proxy war to open aggression in this context in chapter four. In this chapter, Mamdani, as Donald Rumsfeld suggested, connects the valuable dots. First, the shift to open aggression involved the deployment of a multi-lateral proxy in the form of the UN during the Gulf War. Here, the US used the UN to destroy the very fabric of Iraqi society and launch 'a silent war against Iraq's children', many of whom suffered the brunt of UN-imposed economic sanctions and persistent bombing after the end of the Gulf War. Second, there was a shift in US perceptions of Iraqi and Saddam Hussein from a regime it used to fight Iran to one it loved to bomb and demolish, from a country that was used to gas the Iraq Kurds in 1987 to one it condemned for gassing the same Kurds in 1988, from a country whose forces it trained to use chemical and biological agents in the 1960s to one it inspected to control the use of the same agents (179-181). For Mamdani, the UN was an effective American proxy for LIC, one through which the US deployed 'economic sanctions as a weapon of mass destruction' (190).

In the final chapter, Mamdani makes several important suggestions. First, he calls for a better conceptualisation of terror through the avoidance of the religious metaphors used to describe terrorism. The religious metaphors have a testament of finality to them; they do neither admit negotiation and nor do they encourage dialogue. They differentiate right from wrong and proceed on the mission of the good destroying the evil. Second, Mamdani makes a persuasive call against the idea of collective punishment which seems to be a US imitation of Israel's response to Palestinian nationalist struggle. He argues that collective punishment is in fact the crucible through which future acts of 'terror' are forged. While the US and Israel may see acts of violence through suicide bombing as terrorist acts, others view them as acts of nationalist heroes.

There is no doubt that Mamdani makes a powerful case that so-called terrorism is more of a political than a religious project. He also makes a powerful case that terrorism has more to do with US foreign policy than with local resentment of freedom, peace and progress. Indeed, Mamdani's point is that the US-backed war on terror has virtually missed the core of the problem. This is a book worth reading and re-reading. It is written in plain language and easily accessible prose. Its scope of data and knowledge surely raises Mamdani into one of the keenest observers of US foreign policy and as one of the major political analysts of our times.



## Notes

1. See for instance, Richard A. Clarke, *Against All Enemies: Inside America's War on Terror*, New York: Free Press, 2004, and Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004, on the inside scoop. For a damaging look at how America is losing the war on terror, see Michael Scheuer, *Imperial Hubris: Why the West is Losing the War on Terror*, Potomac Books, 2004.
2. See for example Michael Hirsh, 'Bush and the World', in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 81, no. 5, September/October 2002, pp. 39-40, who argues that 'US allies must accept that some US unilateralism is inevitable, even desirable. This mainly involves accepting the reality of America's supreme might — and, truthfully, appreciating how historically lucky they are to be protected by such a relatively benign power'. Suffice it to note that all imperial powers in history have used such explanations.
3. Samuel P. Huntington's alarmist analysis knows no bounds. In his recent study, he now argues that the persistent inflow of Hispanic immigrants threatens to divide the United States into two peoples, two cultures, and two languages. This is because the Mexicans and other Latinos, unlike other immigrants, have refused to be assimilated into mainstream US culture. Instead they have formed their own political and linguistic enclaves and are rejecting the Anglo-Protestant values built by the American dream. Vintage Huntington then warns that the US can only ignore this challenge at its peril. See his *Who Are We: The Challenges to America's National Identity*, Simon & Schuster, 2004.
4. Bernard Lewis, 'The Roots of Muslim Rage', in *The Atlantic Online* at <http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/90sep/rage.htm> browsed on May 29, 2004.
5. See Mustafa Malik, 'Review Essay: Bernard Lewis and the Decline of Muslim Civilization', *Middle East Policy*, Vol. IX, no. 2, June 2002, p. 161.
6. Edward W. Said, 'Impossible Histories: Why the Many Islams Cannot be Simplified', in *Harper's Magazine*, July 2002.
7. This theme is extensively and meticulously covering in Edward W. Said, *Covering Islam*, London: Vintage Books, 1997.



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Kofi Agawu, *Representing African Music: Postcolonial Notes, Queries, Positions*, New York: Routledge, 2003, vii + 266pp, US\$ 25.95 (ISBN: 0415943906).

### Peter Wafula Wekesa\*

The term post-colonialism has continued to evoke numerous responses in African scholarship. On the one hand, there has been debate and discontent about the manner in which the term has entered the lexicon of colonial and post-colonial discourse. On the other hand, the vibrancy and elegance of the term in world academic discourse seem to be asserting its legitimacy. Viewed within these two contending positions, it is clear that post-colonialism remains a fiercely contested and debated paradigm. As a theory, the validity of post-colonialism has been subject to critique and challenge. Its disciplinary and political implications have been labelled ‘fictitious’ by Zeleza.<sup>1</sup> Yet, despite the sustained critique, appeals to view the developments in post-colonial theory positively have equally been sustained. As signifying a break from the dominant and hegemonic tradition of western theory, post-colonial theory has been presented as seeking to unmask the enabling constructs of various knowledge systems. With a specific reference to Africa, the theory is understood as a constellation of critical practices drawn from philosophy, history, social theory and literary criticism. The book under review is one attempt to appropriate post-colonial theory in exploring the post-colonial predicament which music practice and study in Africa has continued to endure and experience.

In chapter one the author highlights some of the salient aspects of the impact of colonialism on African music. Tracing a long trajectory of Euro-American influence, beginning from around the 1400s with the coming of the Portuguese, the author argues that although the political, economic and social influences on Africa have been fairly well documented by historians, the place of music has been overly ignored. This it is argued arises from the fact that music leaves different, more complex and elusive traces on the historical record. In order to understand the various colonial influences and put them in perspective, information on the pre-colonial setting and the place of music needs to be highlighted. Although scanty, both written and

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oral sources on pre-colonial Africa have yielded varied information not only on African musical instruments but also on contexts of music making that have been important in understanding the transformative nature of colonial influences. Perhaps, the most obvious sign of colonial influence, as the author emphasises, can be located in the material presence of foreign instruments, harmony, church music and in popular music. Through these sites European music colonised a significant portion of the African musical landscape and transformed music practices. This in turn produced a complex music society in Africa which was cultivated and nurtured at various pioneer African educational institutions including the ones in the nineteenth century Lagos and Achimota School in Ghana. It is worth noting that due to the colonial impact on African music we have in post-colonial Africa a constellation of musical practices. The practices are a consequence of the long history in which foreign modes of expression were sometimes retained, transformed or merely co-existed with indigenous modes of musical expression.

Building on the foregoing, chapter two provides a critical introduction to the archive of knowledge about African music. By archive, the author means a vast body of existing knowledge, both written and oral, about African music. The author argues that although Euro-American students are more familiar with scores of academic writings on African music, access to some of these sources by African students has been problematic. Africa-based scholars have little idea of the cumulative resources available for the study of their music and which are mainly located in Euro-American libraries and archives. The chapter describes a body of texts including the *New Grove Dictionaries of Music*, John Gray's bibliography of African music among others that have over the years sustained scholarly practice on African music. These are examined in detail touching on issues such as language, orality, fieldwork, autobiography and transcription. Although the author admits that most of the recognised texts in the archive are written, rather than oral, in itself a reflection of the European bias in the institutional ordering of knowledge, the historical nature of this bias is hardly contextualised. Although original African philosophies and archival resources exist on music that ought to constitute the core knowledge on the discipline, they have not been seriously appreciated by the western world. Thus the research, analytical and theoretical perspectives have always been extraneous to African thought systems. One therefore wonders whether the glaring misrepresentation of Africa from such western oriented archival knowledge cannot be reversed and whether Africans can ever develop pride in their music on the basis of knowledge produced for them by others. As Zeleza<sup>2</sup> has aptly argued, there is hardly ever a discourse on Africa for Africa's sake, and the West has often

used Africa as a pretext for its own subjectivities, its self-imagination and its perversions.

Chapter three and four are concerned with rhythm which the author argues remains a sensationalised parameter of African music. Though the fact that distinctive quality of African music lies in its rhythmic structure and although rhythm perhaps remains the most imaginatively elaborated in African music, its persistent thematisation in Euro-American discourses raises problematic issues. On the one hand, the author sees the persistence in presenting African rhythm as part of the broader set of imaginings and constructions of Africa. The presentation of polymeter, additive rhythm and cross rhythm in most of the Euro-American literature has hardly addressed key problematics, but rather emphasises power-based constructions of knowledge motivated in part by a search for self through imagined differences. Powered mainly by the author's prior extensive research on African rhythm,<sup>3</sup> these chapters present a unique contribution to the vexed issues relating to the politics of knowledge production on Africa. Veiled behind a persistence regarding the resilience of African rhythm is a plot to deny that Africans can and do control the procedures within other dimensions such as harmony, melody and form with comparative skill.

In chapter five, the author extends the analysis of the relationship between music and language using the metaphor of a text as a point of entry. It is stressed that as complex messages based on specific cultural codes, the varieties of African music known to us today may be designated as text. Designating African music as text, as the author insists, has the advantage of liberating it from the yoke of ostensibly contextual explanations advocated by ethnographers and ethnomusicologists. To the latter analysts, African music can merely be listened to yet the reality is that categorising it into functional and contemplative entities offers interesting sites of engaging various forms of contextual knowledge on African music. Emphasising the importance of language as an aspect that dominates our conceptual apparatus, the author insists that there is nothing surprising in invoking language as a point of reference in talking about music. The latter could be manifested when one examines the usefulness of performance errors as sites of emergence of an indigenous discourse, tonemic transgression in meta-language, singing in the throat and modes of significance in drum music.

Chapter six focuses on popular music. Taking a swipe at earlier works by Nketia (1974) and Bebey (1969) for not paying adequate recognition to popular African music forms such as juju, fuji, afro beat, afro rock, highlife, makossa, taarab and several dozens of others, the author engages the readers in what he calls a defence of popular music. Certainly, there is no gain-

saying the fact that the study of traditional African music seems to have overshadowed that of popular music studies and research in Africa. Yet popular music is the most widely listened to on the continent. According to the author, the reasons for the neglect of popular music could be located in the very circumstances in which knowledge is produced in Africa, in the models of scholarship inherited from European musicology, in the relative lack of participation by emancipated African actors, and in the absence of methodologies suited to music that apparently falls between stools (p. 118). Although a number of individual researchers such as David Coplan, Christopher Waterman and John Collins among many others seem to have brought popular music research to the fore, more efforts need to be enhanced. Although unacknowledged by the author, there seem to exist elaborate organisations including the International Association for the Study of Popular Music (IASPM) which are also increasingly pushing for the study of popular music in the West and in Africa. Numerous publications emanating from such associations seem to receive scanty attention from traditional African musicologists. One wonders whether the silence of the author on the existence of myriad resources especially from IASPM on the study of popular music does not run counter to his avowed 'defence of popular music'.

Beginning with the very definition of popular music, African musicologists ought to engage more comprehensively in the study of our popular music. It is true as the author notes that the definition of popular music has elicited countless taxonomies. What however needs to be emphasised is that the uniting component in these definitions is its focus upon the means of its production, distribution and consumption. What seems to appeal to the author's thesis is that popular music that has an overt western influence. It is a known fact that although African popular music has continued to be influenced by the West, there are forms that have also continued to influence Western music in and outside the continent. Their resistance, as characterised by the *Benga* in East Africa and their continued incorporation with external genres, offers an interesting potential in the study of popular music. Indeed in the context of West Africa, the author has elaborated this unique interplay between traditional and popular music as is characterised in highlife especially through a reading of the music by E. T. Mensah.

Chapter seven interrogates the notion of difference as it has come to inform ethnomusicological writing about Africa. Its aims are fourfold: to observe the foundational status of difference in ethnomusicology; to recall a handful of thematisations of difference in ethnomusicology that represent a particular representational bias; to inquire as to whether the difference is 'real'; and finally to take an explicitly political stance in urging a resistance to

difference (p. 152). At the core of these aims seems to be an emphasis on the fact that although ethnomusicology, both in concept and practice, is founded on difference, this difference is not real. According to the author, the difference is a construction rather than something given in nature and that notions of difference have been employed by scholars seeking to exercise a certain form of power over African subjects. Perhaps there is no better place to locate the history of this difference than in the unfair engagement of Africans and the West that have been characterised through the epochs of slavery, colonialism and neocolonialism. Although the author seems silent on who constructs difference, especially as it relates to Africa, it is true that through the foregoing epochs Africa and Africans have continued to be conceptualised as different from the rest of the human experience. Beginning with disciplines such as anthropology Africa as a different entity has been constructed and imagined into existence through the literature of various travellers, explorers and missionaries. The study of ethnomusicology cannot be divorced from this trap in as far as we note that the discipline was nurtured by colonialism. Colonialism was built around two related assumptions. The first was that Africa had no history. The second was that Africans were primitive. These assumptions did not only emphasise and serve colonial purposes but offered a relational link between 'us' representing the West and the Other. Perhaps a more nuanced question that Agawu poses in contesting difference through an embrace of sameness is whether the latter option would pose fresh critiques. However, a more validating point in relation to musicology and indeed other disciplines is the fresh critique that the author anticipates in Africa. For Africa, the urgent concern is that the continent and its people are not different from others. Their experience is a central part of the overall human experiences. The study of music in Africa thus ought to emphasise Africa as a point of departure in understanding the human experience and not to lodge Africa as a marginal and separate area that is different from the larger human panorama.

Chapter eight builds on the discussion on sameness by particularly focusing on music analysis. The author highlights the importance of analysis in African music and abhors the strictures that have been imposed by European musicologists on the analysis of African music. Noting that ethnomusicology and music theory are the two most relevant disciplines in the analysis of African music, the author, using personal experiences in publishing, challenges African scholars to engage themselves in the analysis of African composition. Such analysis ought to reject superfluous cautions from western ethnomusicologists whose aim is not to empower African scholars and musicians but to reinforce certain metropolitan privileges. Since music

analysis minimises certain forms of cultural knowledge and because it principally rewards the ability to take part and discover or invent modes of internal relating, it is as well a site at which African musicologists can begin to compete favourably with their metropolitan colleagues. The barriers that are placed on analysis hinder the initiatives that provide African scholars with an opportunity to observe at a close range the workings of African musical minds. Such flexibility and diversity in the analysis of African music is ably demonstrated by the author through his defence of analyses from different eras of African musicology, including Hornbostel, Jones, Blacking, Arom and Anku.

Chapter nine links the whole question of music practice and scholarship to ethical considerations. The author argues the case for the inculcation of ethical issues in musicology, music theory and ethnomusicology since they are pertinent to any scholarship that embraces more than one individual. Although a number of scholars seem to emphasise the difficulty of grounding a discussion of ethical issues, the primary question that needs to be thoroughly debated should relate to who sets the standards for ethical considerations. There seems to be emerging a worrying trend that is characterised by what the author calls 'an ethical absolutism' which is manifest in the metropolitan rejection of others' ethics. In the African research context specifically, it makes more sense to approach ethics not by looking for an abstract grounding principle but by focussing on specific, local situations in which we can better control the necessary constraints. Such an approach ought to be aware of the reality that African ethical thought is the product of various historical and socio-cultural circumstances. Presenting a series of personal anecdotes based on fieldwork experiences in Africa, the author confronts the questions as to whether the making of ethnography can ever be an ethical process. The epilogue at the end provides a series of contradictions and antinomies that undergird the analysis of the various themes in the text. While refusing to accept the stricture that the African research agenda and especially that of music should meet the normative requirements of metropolitan logic, the author strongly suggests that this may be advantageous if it highlights the contradictions in congruities, anachronisms and the antinomies that animate post-colonial life and thought. This is obviously a powerful prescription for African researchers and there is no doubt that Agawu seems to address the issues directly. Whether one agrees with the author's prescription is certainly not the point since the book opens up an interesting dimension on the debates on African music.

**Notes**

1. Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, 'Fictions of the Postcolonial: A Review Article', *CODESRIA Bulletin*, no. 2, 1997a.
2. Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, *Manufacturing African Studies and Crises*, Dakar: CODESRIA, 1997b.
3. See Kofi Agawu, 'The Invention of African Rhythm', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, no. 48, 1995 and Kofi Agawu, *African Rhythm: A Northern Ewe Perspective*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.