

## *RESEARCH AFRICA REVIEWS* Vol. 1 No. 3, December 2017

These reviews may be found on the *RA Reviews* website at:

<https://sites.duke.edu/researchafrica/ra-reviews/volume-1-issue-3-december-2017/>

### ***RA Reviews' Editorial Voice: The Reviewing Process - A Case of ALuta Continua***

#### **Muhammed Haron (Editor-in-Chief: *RA Reviews*)**

##### **1. Introduction: *RA Reviews* - A Cause for Celebration?**

*RA Reviews'* editorial board members wish to take this opportunity of making a virtual toast to celebrate the third and final issue of the first volume with the hope that many more volumes will follow in the years to come. Though most of us might not really consider this to be much of a milestone and a feat when looking at it within a broad historical context of journal publishing and when comparing it to other long established online journals that have permanent cyberspace footprints, the board members would want to see *RA Reviews* as a significant academic project - a point that was made in the two previous editorials - and they, more importantly and humbly, consider it as a cause for cheerful celebration.

Now that this online reviews' journal has – if we may be permitted to describe it as such - come of age very early in its short life and one that virtual subscribers (as well as other cyber visitors) should see as an alternative academic African platform, its editorial board members hope that it will function in the interest of everyone associated with Africa's assorted affairs. *RA Reviews'* editorial board members would want to reiterate that this journal should act as a significant conduit via which everyone/scholars and practitioners can freely exchange and generously share their ideas and thoughts on whatever falls within its purview as a reviews' journal.

So whilst *RA Reviews'* editorial board members - and all of those such as authors, reviewers, and readers associated with it – might not necessarily describe themselves as Africa's movers and shakers, they have, to some extent, been the initiators and creators of an African oriented and focused platform; one that would gradually and continuously - through its reviews and reports - contribute towards stimulating robust debates and shaping healthy ideas theoretically and practically about various aspects of the continent. With these thoughts in mind, *RA Reviews'* editorial board members, therefore, principally regard themselves as unbiased transmitters and progressive purveyors of information and knowledge on Africa.

Seeing themselves in this light, *RA Reviews'* editorial board members would want to underscore that those critical reviews and extensive reports on Africa should not only be

intellectually beneficial, but that they should also academically stimulate readers and others to, if possible, initiate related projects and pursue them until they achieve their set goals. They thus see this journal as an academic podium that complements other related African Studies journals and it does not see itself as a competitor as some might opine as they read the journal's various issues that contain a variety of review entries.

## **2. Reviews As a Process of Making Use of Personal Experience, Greenway's Model**

Since mention was made of its entries that are essentially reviews – be they short reviews or review essays – of books, films, and other types of items such as Art work, photographic exhibitions, and museums, it is perhaps an opportune moment to reflect, albeit briefly, on the 'reviewing process'; a process that some of us at times take for granted since a sizeable number among us has been involved in the process over the years, but simultaneously forgetting that there are a growing crop of young emerging (African) scholars who not only require our support, but who need the necessary guidance and mentorship.

For these up-and-coming researchers and promising scholars, they should be made aware at an early stage of their budding career that even if it is a basic book review that such a process is a critical stepping stone into the field of academic writing; they should be appropriately guided so that they observe most if not all the academic standards at all levels. These, in our view, will assist them as they move into their professional sectors and fields. By doing so and observing the set academic rules, they will demonstrate their preparedness to operate within a critical and open-minded environment where they accept the fact that their final drafted text, which they carefully worked on, have to go through a blind peer review system; one that ensures that the academic standards are met and that if peer reviewers request several improvements then these have to be made before the text is approved to be published (see Roganie Govender's 2015 short essay titled '5 reasons why peer review matters' online: [www.elsevier.com](http://www.elsevier.com)).

At this juncture, the editorial turns briefly to the notion of 'reviewing' that is the operative descriptive word in the phrase 'the reviewing process'. Whilst in the previous two issues the respective June and September editorials drew upon online and published works to define and reflect upon 'book reviews', this editorial unpacks the word 'reviewing' and it extracts some of its thoughts from Roger Greenway's online text titled 'Reviewing: What, Why and How?' (see [www.reviewing.co.uk](http://www.reviewing.co.uk)). Though it is not here going to draw on all the points contained in his online essay, it will selectively do so and in doing that it intends to also paraphrase a few ideas so that these fit aptly into the circumscribed scheme that this editorial has in mind.

Greenway proffered a definition – under 'what is reviewing?' - that has slightly been altered for this editorial; he stated that, 'Reviewing is any process that helps one to make use of personal experience for one's learning and development.' Greenway went on to point out that the

reviewing process may include, among others, reflecting, analyzing, learning, communicating, reframing, and making sense of the text's (such as a documentary review) contents. He further highlighted the fact that there were alternative terms or rather synonyms for the word 'reviewing' and according to him they are reflecting, debriefing, and processing; even though these three words do not fit meaningfully here, they illustrate the term's rich connotations when used. The second question that Greenway responded to was 'why review?' and he listed the following points as reasonable answers to the question: (a) to add value in understanding a published text or a produced film from a particular dimension; (b) to achieve one's objectives in publishing the essay; (c) to open new perspectives on an issue; (d) to encourage critical self-reflection; and (e) to empower each other intellectually.

One can thus conclude from Greenway's essay that 'reviewing' as a process is definitely important in different stages of one's life, and it applies to all disciplines and fields of inquiry; for those of us in the academic arena, it is significant since the idea is to chiefly contribute towards the academia and more specifically to the production of knowledge in a vigorous and substantial way; in other words, one's academic inputs via reviews, essays, reports and other documents assist in building on past information and adding value for future purposes. It, *inter alia*, spells out one's objectives more clearly, it develops applicable critical skills, and it generates ample proof for evaluation.

### 3. Reviews as Evaluation, Reviews as Debates: Bazerman's Two Models

Speaking of evaluation, here the editorial draws a few thoughts from Charles Bazerman's *The Informed Writer: Using Sources in the Disciplines* (Fort Collins, Colorado: WAC Clearing House, 2010) before concluding this editorial. In Chapter 8 of Bazerman's worthy readable text for prospective writers and likely scholars, he put forward two theoretical models in his subsection titled 'What a Book Review Does'.

The first of the two that he reflected on was 'Reviews as **Evaluation**'. Bazerman simply stated that these types of reviews are fairly widespread and well known because all of us live in a consumerist society; one in which common evaluative reviews help us to decide on purchasing a particular product whether it is a bar of soap in the supermarket or a book in a local bookshop. These types such as an evaluative report aim at assigning value to, for example, an institution of higher learning or for that matter a prescribed text book. According to Bazerman, when scanning reviews in printed newspapers and online magazines one will note that a particular review would essentially evaluate or really rate a video, for example, in relation to a related product in the video store.

The second model that he forwarded was the 'Reviews as **Debates**' model; this one differs markedly from the previous one in that it is not basically evaluative, but one that engages in healthy debate and lively discussion to either elaborate further on what the

author/producer/curator expressed or to critically question the premises on which they built their arguments to prove their points. Whilst the earlier types of reviews feature prominently in the daily newspapers or online magazines, the latter types one comes across in serious scholarly journals; ones that are published and circulated by reputable publishers who have done, wonderful service to the academic community in producing an array of scholarly journals that was set up with the aim of adding substantial value to the existing body of knowledge across a variety of disciplines; in the process, African Studies was one of those fields of inquiry that benefitted handsomely from these trend of publications.

#### **4. The Reviewing Process: *A Luta Continua***

After Bazerman provided examples of book reviews that illustrated the different approaches and varied interpretations, he used these samples to underscore that they belonged to this special category (that is, the second one) that is not the same as evaluative reviews; ones that avoid getting entangled in detailed discussions and lengthy debates. He rounded off his chapter describing and discussing ‘writing a book review’ and by offering a few ideas of how to go about doing that.

Whilst a review may be described as a writing exercise that is not only a painstaking process, but one that is an ongoing one, it may also be argued that this applies equally to the reviewing process that is undertaken by one or two peer reviewers. Hence, the sub-title of this editorial and that is that the reviewing process is indeed ‘a case of *Aluta continua*’; one that points to the fact that writing for both the writer and the reviewer is a constant struggle and that is one that is continuous. The writing process, as a matter of fact, is not only encountered by the seasoned writer/reviewer, but it also happens to the budding writer and emerging reviewer who possess little or no experience; for them it is *A luta continua* experience.

Before ending it should be stated that for this issue the target of twelve reviews were not reached. Nonetheless, for this issue the team was able to secure among others book reviews, a review essay, a film review, an edited book summary, and a conference report. RART hopes that as from this year scholars will readily be contributing towards the three issues (April, August, and December) set for 2018.

#### **Acknowledgement**

The Editor-in-Chief expresses as usual his appreciation to each and every member of RART for their various inputs at different stages of the process. He registers his heartfelt gratitude to Duke University’s Professor Mbaye Lo who had been involved at various stages editorially. And he also records his thanks to RA's team including Leah Rothfeld and Madison Cullinan, as well as Elise Muller (OIT) at Duke University, who assisted in finalizing this particular issue.

**Research Africa**

Copyright © 2017 by Research Africa, (research\_africa-editor@duke.edu), all rights reserved. RA allows for copy and redistribution of the material in any medium or format, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and the location of the review on the RA website. You may not distribute the modified material. RA reserves the right to withdraw permission for republication of individual reviews at any time and for any specific case. For any other proposed uses, contact RA's Editor-in-Chief. The opinions represented in the reviews and published on the RA Reviews website are not necessarily those held by RA and its Review editorial team.

ISSN 2575-6990