

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/>

Khalid Bekkaoui, *Moroccans in Europe: Fassi Merchants Come to Manchester*
University Sidi Mohammed Ben Abdallah, Moroccan Cultural Studies Center, 2016
148pp. ISBN: 978-9954-37-682-9.

Reviewed by: Mbaye Lo, Duke University

Khalid Bekkaoui's monograph, *Moroccans in Europe: Fassi Merchants Come to Manchester* is a much-needed diversion from the current dominance of security studies in African studies, a residue of the War on Terror. The emergence of security studies has projected a reductive reading of Muslim societies, where people's diverse experiences are framed in disparaging discussion of Shari'a, terrorism, and militant Islam's violence. Thus lived-Islam's great tradition of *Ma'roof* (good deed), *Islaah* (reconciliation /progress) and transmission of knowledge has been ignored. In this selective framing, the lives of ordinary Africans are, as marketed by Alexis Okeowo, *A Moonless, Starless Sky* (Okeowo 2017). Fortunately, two recent works eschew this pitfall: Ousmane Kane (2016) and Fallou N'Gom (2016). In *Beyond Timbuktu*, Kane indirectly scorns the securitization of the study of Islam in Africa that focuses recurrently on violence and terrorism by calling attention to the versatile Islamic intellectual tradition in the Sahel region, noting that "throughout the second millennium, black Africans, Berbers, and Arabs maintained close contacts" (Kane) (p. 6). In *Muslims Beyond the Arab World*, N'Gom postulates a drastic shift from a focus on political Islam in the Arab world, which has become a center of negative attention in the global discourse on Muslims. The alternative in N'Gom's argument could be looking into local adaptation and transformation of Arabic into resilient and dynamic Muslim cultures. The Odyssey of Ajami in Senegal is his case in point (N'Gom 2016).

Through these variant responses to the rise of security studies, one senses the difference between Kane and N'Gom to be methodological as both agree on the need to invigorate what they call the 'African Library.' It is worth mentioning that the *African Library* is not static, but an evolving project that involves Africa's collective memory, imagination, thought and newly acquired skills. Methodologically, there are three ways of reconstructing and enriching this *African Library*.

The first approach involves intensive and expansive anthropological work on Africa's indigenous knowledge and frame of mind. This is still an under-examined field in the discipline. Roy Dilley's work on the Haalpulaar's knowledge practices is one of the few examples of this approach (Dilley, 2004). The second approach requires systematic exploration of Africa's presence in ancient Arabia and alongside Africa's expanding contemporary diasporas or Pan-Africanism. It is worth mentioning that one of the potential perspectives on African indigenous knowledge could come from the African diaspora in the classical Arabo-Islamic era. Arabic writers who associated their creative

themes with black or Zinj are plentiful. They include as example Antara ibn Shaddad (525-608 ad), Abu Usman al-Jahiz (776-869) and Muhammad ibn Tughj al-Ikhshid, the Abbasid commander and ruler of Egypt (882 –946). Strategically, exploration of the modern African diaspora has to prioritize what Paul Gilroy has popularized as the *Black Atlantic*, specially the African-American part of these resilient diaspora communities (Gilroy 1993).

The third approach involves reclaiming or reconstructing African perspectives from the precolonial and colonial archives. Although colonial archives were instrumental in the erection of the colonial project of conquest and subjugation, I am not sure if dismantling this project can successfully move forward without a systematic reconstruction of its archives. Since the task of dismantling is often easier than that of reconstructing, then the desire to dismantle the colonial knowledge enterprise should not be more urgent than the drive to construct an African one. Current works such as *Politics of African Anticolonial Archive* by El-Malik and Kamola (El-Malik and Kamola 2017) and Namhila's book *Native Estates* (Namhila 2017) have demonstrated ways of utilizing the colonial archives to mend modern day deficiencies in African knowledge perspectives.

To this last approach belongs Bekkaoui's monograph that is under review. It is a concise catalogue of the presence of "Moroccans" (in the language of the author,) or "Moors," "Blacks," or "Arabs" (in the language of their European interlocutors). The value of the book is its potential in opening up new horizons for research rather than in the details that it unveils. The book is more of a collection or bundle of significant historical occurrences that were lost in our rushed transit to a modern mode of knowledge transmission. It reads like a resume that singles out powerful signposts in the path of those interested in Africa's reservoir of knowledge.

As noted by the author, the aim of the book is to "shed light on Moroccan merchants of Manchester, on how immigration and foreign commerce have transformed them into a cosmopolitan elite, on the participation of Moroccan women in such an enterprise, and on how foreign trade and travel impacted Moroccan culture and society during the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries." (p.12). The author followed suit on this listing but never with any detail or critical examination. Through two parts. "Moroccans of Manchester: Border Crossing" and "Diasporic Consciousness and Archival Sources" respectively, the reader is presented with a litany of segmented information, selected texts, quotations and correspondences on a variety of conceptually unrelated topics. I will present some topical contents of the two parts that may be useful to the reader.

Part One has 13 subtitles, and they are 1. Anglo-Moroccan Trade; 2. Early Moroccan Commercial Encounters with Britain; 3. Moroccan Tujar: Crossing and Dwelling; 4. Bringing Islam to Manchester; 6. The Moroccans in Manchester: Fashioning New Identities; 7. Predicaments of Exile in Foreign Lands; 8. Moroccan Manchester Merchants and British Women; 9. Moorish Women in Manchester Diaspora; 10. How English Tea Became Morocco's National Beverage; 11. The Last Moorish Merchants in

Manchester; 12. Farewell Manchester: The Benjellouns Return to Fez; 13. New Routes, New Experiences.

Part Two has 18 subtitles, and they are 1. Moroccans of Manchester; 2. Picturesque Moroccan Colony Leaves Manchester; 3. Moroccans Enjoy the Manchester Turkish Bath; 4. Aaron Afriat Applies for British Citizenship, 1874; 5. Mohammed Mustafa-Ducaly; 6. A Dishonest Servant Girl; 7. A Moorish Merchant and Gladstone; 8. Benani and Benjeloun at Court; 9. A Black Servant Girl, From Taroudant to Manchester; 10. Business Correspondence with Manchester; 11. Moorish Lady's Death; 12. Manchester Trade: Letter from Hamed Boayed; 13. The first Moroccan Failure in Manchester; 14. A Sensational Abduction: A Moor and an English Girl; 15. The Mosque Marriage: Clara Casey Tells Her Story; 16. Married to a Moor; 17. The Last of the Moors; 18. Kenza Laghzaoui in America.

The author's style is to present information without detailing its context. Thus mentioning how a given event was reported at that time based on primary sources, which are mostly citations and quotations from European journals and publications, limited local commentary is added in only a few cases. For instance, when discussing 'How English Tea Became Morocco's National Beverage' in Part One, the author highlights a major cultural outcome of the commercial encounter between Britain and Morocco which resulted in Moroccan shifting habits from drinking Turkish coffee to drinking English Tea. This cultural shift started when British and French missionaries, ambassadors and merchants introduced tea to Morocco in the late seventeenth century. By the second half of the nineteenth century, consuming tea had spread gradually from the elites to become a popular beverage. Among the primary sources the author uses in reporting this change is Gabriel Charmes' 1887 book, *Une Ambassade au Maroc* in which he notes "the drink one is offered every where is tea, as though the English have been there!... But it must be added though, as an attenuating circumstance, that the Moroccan tea, which is called ataïy, is seasoned with mint called nâây and verbena called luisaj...which prevents it from resembling the detestable English tea." (p. 77). The author then describes the rituals of serving tea, citing primary sources that range from observation from Emily Keene, the English wife of a Moroccan elite to its echoes in the local Muslim discourse of whether it was *halaal* (permissible in Islam) or *haraam* (prohibited in Islam) to drink tea in that European fashion.

The book raises variant points of interest to political discourse regarding the evolution of the relationship between Africa and Europe: Has Europe ever perceived African sovereigns as equals? Sultan Moulay Abdellah did not hesitate in 1751 to insist in a Treaty of Peace with William Petticrew that "his subjects, whether Jewish or Muslim, should not be prohibited from living and working in Gibraltar, as they wished to do so." (p. 2). In another treaty signed in Fez on 28 July 1760, and renewed multiple times later, the document guaranteed that if a subject of the sultan of Fez and Morocco desires to transport commodities and good across British dominions, "he shall be permitted to do it without paying greater duties or impositions than other nations pay." (p. 2).

Issues of inter-communal and cultural exchanges on whether residing in *Dar al-Kufr* (land of disbelief) is permissible for Muslims were settled in the religious discourse by the first half of the nineteenth century. By this time, Moroccan Sufi groups of different *Zawiyyah* (orders) were already sending their disciples to participate and perform in different circuses, popular showplaces and musical halls in Spain, France and Germany (p. 2-3).

Bekkaoui's monograph is a reference guide to researchers and graduate students who are interested in conceivable topics to explore, primary sources to consult or supportive evidence for their incursion into new frontiers of expanding African perspectives. Researchers in both African studies and Arabo-Islamic studies are the primary beneficiaries of such a meticulous collection.

Works Cited

- Dilley, Roy. Islam and Caste Knowledge Practices among Haalpulaar'en in Senegal: Between Mosque and Termite Mound. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004.
- El-Malik, Shiera and Isaac Kamola. Politics of African Anticolonial Archive (Kilombo: International Relations and Colonial Questions). Rowman & Littlefield International, 2017.
- Gilroy, Paul. The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness. Harvard University Press, 1993.
- Kane, Ousmane. Beyond Timbuktu An Intellectual History of Muslim West Africa. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016.
- Namhila, Ellen Ndeshi. Native Estates: Records of Mobility Across Colonial Boundaries. Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2017.
- N'Gom, Fallou. Muslims Beyond the Arab World: The Odyssey of Ajami and the Muridiyya. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Okeowo, Alexis. A Moonless, Starless Sky: Ordinary Women and Men Fighting Extremism in Africa. New York: Hachette Books, 2017.