Historians and other social scientists have ascribed a critical role to supernatural spirits in African belief systems. But as far as Senegambia is concerned, this theme deserves more emphasis, and Sarr’s book is a decisive step in this direction.

Many European travelers’ accounts and African oral narratives depict the Bainunk (those who have been pushed away in the Mandinka lexicon) as the landowners in the region between The Gambia and Guinea-Bissau, including the Casamance. Several previous studies cited by Sarr yield strong evidence that the Bainunk had already occupied southern Senegambia before the arrival of the first Portuguese mariners in the 1400s, and before the settlement of later immigrant groups in this region. But over time and space the Bainunk lost their original cohesion as a group through processes of warfare, forced exile, self-imposed exile, or assimilation into other ethnic groups (Mandinka, Jola and Balanta). Given this antiquity, Sarr could have paid closer attention to the role of the Bainunk when analyzing land ownership and related matters in the Gambia River region. In sum, by bringing to the fore many core characteristics of land that have previously been neglected or misunderstood in historical narratives, this book is an excellent contribution to the history of West Africa.

Aly Dramé  
Dominican University


This collection of essays from the late John Peel, Emeritus Professor of Anthropology and Sociology at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, represents the culmination of over half a century of thinking about religious change among the Yoruba in Southwestern Nigeria. Through an exploration of the interactions between Christianity, Islam, and oriṣa religion from the early days of colonialism right up to the present day, Peel shows why these three religions have coexisted peacefully in Yorubaland, while other parts of Nigeria have experienced violent religious conflict. Although every chapter can certainly be read alone, they are all united by Peel’s unwavering “commitment to comparison as a tool of analysis” (p. 11). Peel aims to restore the comparative method to its rightful place at the center of historical inquiry.

Peel divides his book into two parts. While Part 1 contains revised versions of familiar essays published elsewhere between 1987 and 2009, Part 2 makes an original contribution to our understanding of Islam among the Yoruba.1 In these chapters, Peel compares the

---

ways in which Christianity and Islam developed in the Yoruba context. He explores religious conversion to world religions, the relationship between world religions and Yoruba culture, and how Pentecostalism and Islam frequently borrow from each other to remain competitive in the spiritual marketplace. Peel also discusses whether Pentecostalism is a mirror image of Salafism, and a final chapter explores why oriṣa religion has flourished abroad, but not at home.

This research is based on fieldwork that Peel undertook in Southwestern Nigeria in 2008 and 2009. Over a period of six months, he conducted interviews with Yoruba Muslims, collected local documentary materials, and read dissertations submitted to the Arabic and Islamic Studies Department at the University of Ibadan. Peel initially presented his findings as the Birkbeck Lectures in Ecclesiastical History at the University of Cambridge in 2009, and then as the Winchester Lectures in World Religions at the University of Oxford in 2011.

While space does not permit me to discuss each essay of this stimulating book, I would like to address briefly the issue of religious conversion. Peel, following in the footsteps of his colleague and collaborator anthropologist Robin Horton, argues in Chapter 7 that the establishment of colonialism facilitated the conversion of the Yoruba to Islam and Christianity because it shifted the concerns of the Yoruba away from the microcosm to the macrocosm (pp. 126–31). This radical functionalism, which assumes that it is natural to find a one-to-one relationship between social conditions and religious beliefs, oversimplifies the conversion process not only by neglecting the subjective dimension, but also by depicting conversion as something that was inevitable within the context of colonial rule. Switching from one religion to another is a deeply individual experience, and the interaction of the intellectual, practical, spiritual, and emotional elements that result in religious change can only be properly investigated and understood on a micro level.

Some of Peel’s terminology also deserves comment. Throughout the book, Peel regularly refers to “oriṣa religion” (e.g., pp. 10, 215), but he does not explain why oriṣa should be called a “religion” in the first place. Those who embraced world religions such as Christianity or Islam, often retained elements of African “religions” in both practice and belief. For this reason, oriṣa may not be a religion, at least in an ideological sense, since many converts did not view the adoption of Christianity or Islam as something that contradicted the maintenance of African “religions.” Peel also fails to define what he means by “conversion,” although he notes in his introduction that conversion “was never a


narrowly religious process” (p. 2). The frequency with which he and others deploy this important term with imprecision in the literature on religious change makes it difficult to assess the depth of the conversion being studied.

Peel’s book lacks a concluding chapter, which he could have used to pull the threads of his eleven essays together in a coherent manner. This text is also slightly marred by the absence of a bibliography. Since Peel spent more than fifty years writing about religion in Southwestern Nigeria, a comprehensive list of his primary and secondary sources would have been a boon to neophytes looking to take the plunge into the world of Yoruba religion.

Aside from these minor shortcomings, Christianity, Islam, and Oriṣa Religion makes a welcome contribution to our knowledge of Yoruba Islam. Until now, anthropologists have not given this subject any serious attention, and the only in-depth historical study on the topic was published almost forty years ago. A word of praise should also be extended to the University of California Press for including this book in Luminos, its open access monograph publishing program.

D. DMITRI HURLBUT
Boston University


A monograph in Ohio University Press’s New African Histories Series, The Art of Life in South Africa traces the history of the Ndaleni School for the training of art teachers during the years 1952 to 1981. Located at a remote former mission station near Richmond in what is now ZwaZulu-Natal, Ndaleni has received little scholarly attention to date. This case study is a valuable addition to the existing literature on the training of African artists under apartheid, but it is also more broadly a study of the pedagogical sources of the Bantu Educational system. Established in 1953, Bantu Education was premised on maintaining distinct racial systems of education. Although historian Daniel Magaziner concedes that the graduates of Ndaleni’s program, who were credentialed to teach in Bantu Education schools, were “cogs in the machinery of white supremacy,” he argues that, “(t)hey were also people open to the possibility of beauty…” (pp. 5, 7). According to the author, “The Art of Life in South Africa is the story of community, a school, and the idea that people everywhere are creative beings, capable of making manifest their unique visions of the world” (p. 7).

Of course, artists have continued to create under oppression and censorship throughout history, but after stating the obvious fact that apartheid was never monolithic, he asserts that historical time, “must be understood to be soil, always and everywhere awaiting an

---