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Review of Barz, Gregory and Cohen, Judah M., eds. *The Culture of AIDS in Africa: Hope and Healing through Music and the Arts*. New York: Oxford, 2011, xvii + 538 pp.

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**Barz, Gregory and Cohen, Judah M., eds. *The Culture of AIDS in Africa: Hope and Healing through Music and the Arts*. New York: Oxford, 2011, xvii + 538 pp.**

There is a sizeable literature that exists on HIV/AIDS in Africa. The majority of these works focus on the impact of the disease in Africa and the efforts of Western organizations and scholars to fight the pandemic. Very few discuss the intervention efforts and programs Africans themselves have made regarding this disease. *The Culture of AIDS in Africa* addresses this dearth by exposing the approaches Africans and non-Africans have used in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Specifically, according to Barz and Cohen, the thirty two chapters show the “many pathways by which music and other expressive forms gained prominence in Africa as agents for addressing HIV and AIDS, helping individuals and communities address the local and international conversations coursing through their lives in the process” (5). More importantly, one learns the African meaning of HIV/AIDS and understands the disease and its impact from an African context. The book uses examples, descriptions, and analyses of projects conducted mostly in eastern and southern Africa.

The book is divided into an introduction, six sections, and a conclusion. Each section is separated from the other by an interlude, which is a short personal essay or song. The chapters discuss the use of various media such as newspaper cartoons, drama, puppet shows, and photography in health-intervention and education programs. Most of the chapters focus on the use of music.

The first section consists of four essays that discuss music’s effective role in describing the devastation the disease has wrought and the hope that remains. These chapters offer not just discussions and descriptions, but actual lyrics, personal experiences, and scripts as well. For instance, *Born in Africa*, one of the first documentaries on the epidemic in Africa, is transcribed in chapter three. The second section has three chapters. Here, one learns from authors who have developed and carried out arts-based health intervention programs from music to youth forums. These touching and interesting accounts give powerful and useful insights from the perspectives of people who worked in Africa. One learns that fighting the disease in the continent requires understanding the individual, communal, and political perceptions that exist.

The five essays in the third section discuss the use of edutainment media in several countries, including South Africa, Cote d’Ivoire, Togo, and Botswana. For people interested in developing campaigns on the disease, these essays provide great insight into multimedia approaches. In chapter 12, Eckhard Breitingger suggests that campaigns could succeed if governments are positively involved.

Specifically, the chapter discusses Malawi's use of posters to fight the epidemic. The chapter also includes photographs that show the importance of considering a country's unique cultural characteristics and values in creating messages. As the author puts it, "displaying moral, ethical, and aesthetic values that are current" in countries "offer one strategy for government intervention in a multi-front battle against a devastating and vexing pandemic" (143). The fourth section has five essays that examine the contributions of individual artistes/creators like Ugandan singer Vilimina Nakiranda, South African photojournalist Gideon Mendel, Zimbabwean singer Oliver Mtukudzi, and singers and playwrights from Kenya and Tanzania. The essays demonstrate how these performers have used culturally unique symbols and language to reach their audiences and contribute to the discourse.

Part five of the book examines HIV/AIDS responses from a group perspective. Here, one learns of the contributions of performance groups, such as choirs, drama groups, and circuses in four chapters. Leah Niederstadt's essay, "'I'm a Rich Man, How Can I Die?' Circus Performance as a Means of HIV/AIDS Education in Ethiopia," gives a fascinating account of the activist and entertainment roles of circuses. Though faced with a number of challenges, circuses are an important part of Ethiopian culture. Authentically Ethiopian circuses use culturally specific folktales, clothes, songs, and dance to highlight ethnic identity. Niederstadt explains that Ethiopian circus performance is similar to theatrical performance. Economic and social issues like HIV/AIDS in the 1990s made the circus a "theatre of necessity" (325). Using a combination of skits, acrobatics, juggling, and more, circus members perform with edutainment goals. The Circus in Ethiopia organization also publishes a magazine that spreads information on HIV/AIDS. The final section of the book has four essays, which are case studies using various research approaches. Here, the authors explore different art forms or artistes, such as South Africa's *kwaito* music and female hip-hop artistes in Uganda, and their contributions to the fight.

Overall, this collection of essays makes an important contribution, not only to health-intervention or cultural studies, but also to various areas in the humanities, social sciences, and more. Readers will learn of campaigns and strategies that have worked. For the most part, however, the authors do not take a critical view of their work. There is little or no discussion of what was done wrong, what could have been done better. Such information would be helpful in knowing what to avoid. The collection also lacks a contribution on the influence or use of social media and the internet, which have gained ground in different parts of Africa and have been beneficial to the fight against the pandemic. Nevertheless, the collection has fascinating and useful information that shed light on what Africans are doing for

Africans through the arts in the case of HIV/AIDS.

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