

French-speaking nations, which – thanks to the mediation of translators and publishers in the United States, where African philosophy has made a significant academic impact and presence – have become an essential part of the resources of the English-speaking African school.

Prime examples of such crossing are the works of V. Y. Mudimbe and Paulin J. Hountondji. In this respect, one can contrast *A Short History of African Philosophy* with Grégoire Biyogo's *Histoire de la philosophie africaine, Livre II* (l'Harmattan, 2006), which makes no mention of any work in African philosophy in the English language, or of an English-speaking African philosopher other than when he lists (pp. 216–17) some philosophers by their countries of origin.

This expanded and updated edition of Hallen's work will be a valuable asset as a highly accessible reference, not only for the undergraduate student, but also for graduates and researchers.

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MONICA BLACKMUN VISONÀ, *Constructing African Art Histories for the Lagoons of Côte d'Ivoire*. Farnham and Burlington VT: Ashgate Publishing (hb £65 – 978 1 40940 440-8). 2010, 216 pp.

Monica Blackmun Visonà is one of the few scholars who have done extensive fieldwork in the south-eastern part of Côte d'Ivoire – a region largely neglected by African art studies. Her book is an account of research conducted on the arts of the peoples living in the area and of her own field research. Visonà invites the reader to follow her own experience since she started to do fieldwork. Her documentation is based on three stays between 1981 and 1989, complemented by research in colonial archives. As an art historian, Visonà begins with a review of disciplinary assumptions that were taken for granted in the early 1980s when she started her fieldwork. Visonà writes that she intended to focus 'upon specific cultures rather than upon theoretical questions' (p. 9). This did not free her, however, from working within widely held assumptions of the time, such as the 'one tribe, one style' equation or the decline of artistic practices with modernity. How Visonà became aware of such disciplinary shortcomings while conducting her fieldwork is a thread that winds through much of the first half of the book. Visonà insists repeatedly that she is an art historian, which appears a little dated as the field of African art studies is thoroughly interdisciplinary. The chapter nevertheless ends with a page on 'new disciplines and subdisciplines' (p. 23), where she claims that visual culture studies would perhaps contribute more to the understanding of Lagoon arts than conventional anthropology and art history.

Visonà adopts a constructivist approach, identifying eight 'styles' and a residual category that covers the artworks that do not fit into one of the other styles. She builds her categories both on iconography and on style (proportion, shape and alignment). She outlines similarities and gives lists of masters and the artworks that they presumably have created. Almost all masters are anonymous. Some are identified by capital letters, many by a characteristic of their art, such as 'master of the huge hands' (p. 80). Visonà's attempt to construct a corpus of Lagoon sculpture is an impressive account of what can be said so far on the art coming from this part of Côte d'Ivoire. What is missing is the social background. As the masters are identified by and through the artworks, it remains unclear to what degree such styles were shared by more than one artist. As we know from

studies of workshops in other parts of Africa, styles are often created through the cooperation of several artists who work together and exchange ideas regularly on how a particular type of artwork should look. Whether this is a valid model for Lagoon artists is a question that she does not raise.

Visonà goes on to analyse art in the context of leadership and prestige. Here, she looks at artistic forms as part of expressive culture, in particular at art in the context of age grade ceremonies. The usual distinction of fine and performing arts is abandoned in favour of an integrative analysis. Visonà comes back to her earlier statements about modern concepts and genres that do not fit African arts. Though this debate peaked in the 1980s and 1990s, it is still worth remembering what has been argued – in particular as the art market and its protagonists continue to reproduce Western notions.

The final section of the book is dedicated to ‘Lagoon artists in a global context’. Visonà first traces how Lagoon artworks found their way into modernity and how they were appropriated by the artworld as a global institution. She looks at the complexity of the relations that inform the exchange in the artworld. Her main example is Emile Guebehi, who is known for his life-size figures that are both commissioned by private collectors and local age-grade associations. Besides, he has powerful patrons as the former director of the National Museum, and some of his work has been on display in New York. The divergence between interpretations of Guebehi’s sculptures is striking: while some see it as a ‘hybrid’ art that comments on Western notions of male consumption and female seduction, others claim that the sculptures record the history of the Ebrîé and illustrate past events (pp. 172–3).

Visonà adopts an art historian’s perspective, but the book raises more questions, in particular about the present. Her empirical data mainly stem from the 1980s, which makes it all the more interesting to ask how Lagoon arts look today, after the end of the crisis that has rocked the country since the turn of the new century. Monica Blackmun Visonà has published a book on the arts of the Lagoon people that will stand as a reference, particularly as the conflict has inhibited many art historians from continuing their studies in the country.

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FERNANDO ARENAS, *Lusophone Africa: beyond independence*. Minneapolis MN and London: University of Minnesota Press (pb £14 – 978 0 81666 984 4). 2011, 368 pp.

This book sets out to draw on globalization and post-colonial studies in analysing Lusophone Africa. There is much about these countries that would appear to defeat the purpose of looking at them as a coherent conceptual entity. To begin with, nature has not been fair to all of them. Angola and São Tomé and Príncipe have oil; Cape Verde is a largely dry archipelago with a seemingly industrious population that appears to have made the best of remittances from its migrants and tourism; Mozambique is, as far as natural resources and size are concerned, richer than Guinea-Bissau but poorer than Angola. Moreover, their post-colonial political fortunes are disparate. These different political paths in the aftermath of independence do not seem to suggest any obvious link back to their common colonial past that would help account for the differences. It is against this background that Fernando Arenas’s book should be read.