

Koevoet as a political phenomenon. But this is the first book to contain the recollections of a native Namibian fighter and hence does deserve to be added to our library. Sisingi Kamongo has an impressive memory for detail (especially about tracking and weaponry) and if he underplays the role of coercion, even torture in the search for information (“To slap someone around a bit was okay,” p. 104), if he has bought into the South African attitude about Black governments to the north and anti-communist perspectives on the total struggle against “Godless” communism, then we have to endure the frequent evangelical asides in order to grasp the intensity of the war.

KENNETH W. GRUNDY

*Cleveland Heights, OH*

***Contemporary Francophone African Writers and the Burden of Commitment.*** By Odile Cazenave & Patricia Célérier. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011. Pp. 246; bibliography, index. \$55.00 cloth, \$24.50 paper.

Odile Cazenave and Patricia Célérier problematize the term “engagement” by examining it through historical, political, and social perspectives. Many African writers struggle to define themselves first and foremost as authors rather than solely on the basis of nation, culture, or geography. In their introduction, Cazenave and Célérier provide an overview of the concept of engagement, highlighting the historical context of the intellectual *engagé* starting out with Emile Zola’s seminal “J’accuse” to Sartre’s ideologies when referring to a *littérature engagée*. In the context of Francophone African writers, one cannot discuss commitment and engagement without postcolonization. Therefore the authors bring to light a number of related issues dealing with Francophone literature, such as “the origins of Black civilizations, the elaboration of a Black aesthetics, the question of authenticity and tradition, the role of *oralité* and vernacular African languages, the use of French and the function of the writer and critic” (p. 7).

Chapter 1, “Enduring Commitments,” focuses on the role of *littérature engagée* in Francophone African literatures. Analyzing the works of writers and critics such as Sembène Ousmane, Mongo Beti, Aminata Sow Fall, and Henri Lopès, the authors consider how the notion of engagement differs for various writers depending upon national/transnational, social, economic and political realities. Parallel to that and just as important is the role of the writer as an artist whose function is to be free to create.

The second chapter, “The Practice of Memory,” stresses the importance of history for postcolonial writers. Among the various questions considered are: “How do we remember?” How should history be re-written by transforming myths and heroes? The chapter highlights the Duty of Memory Project on Rwanda and the way it pushed the participating writers “to engage in a cultural and historical context mostly foreign to them” (p. 56–58). The chapter brings to light complex issues of moral responsibility and justice, the links between memory and the *engagé* writer, the difficulty of looking at the past when you only have traces, when “official” history has been manipulated, and the challenge for writers to re-create history in order to preserve memory by linking stories and histories. It

analyzes a number of works by writers (writing from inside and outside the continent), including Werewere Liking, Véronique Tadjo, Michèle Rakotoson, Boubacar Boris Diop, and Ken Bugul.

Chapter 3, “Lifting the Burden?” rethinks the concept of engagement as well as the place of Francophone African literatures outside of Africa and in relation to French and world literature. Writers from the late 1980s to today have redefined and reconfigured the spaces and subjects that they highlight in their writings. Issues such as immigration across African borders, migration, dislocation, violence, and human rights have become prevalent in their work. Many of their narratives are set in the French Caribbean; this allows them to transgress the roles assigned to earlier generations of writers and in so doing have “lift[ed] the burden of Engagement and shift[ed] from an *engagée* literature to an engaging literature” (pp. 137–38).

The last chapter, “The Fashioning of an Engaging Literature,” emphasizes the various challenges that Francophone African literatures face in terms of “market forces” and “cultural stereotyping” (p. 139). The authors raise the complex vicious cycle and paradoxical situation that writers face because “in order to benefit from institutional support and be published, they must fashion their writing carefully and make that engagement engaging” (p. 167), and in so doing they run the risk (if they are not careful) of losing their voice and falling into a “literary ghettoization” (p. 141). Writers proclaim the rights to be considered as more than simply “products of decolonisation” (p. 143), but rather Francophone African writers who are part of a world literature written in French.

This is an essential critical text that eloquently represents the current debates regarding the relationship between how authors engage and commit to their cultures, and the place and role of culture and identity in this engagement in contemporary African literatures. It also points to the ongoing issues regarding the role of the artist in the development of society.

CÉCILE ACCILIEN

*Columbus State University (Georgia)*

*Disputing the Floodplains: Institutional Change and the Politics of Resource Management in African Wetlands.* Edited by Tobias Haller. Leiden: Brill, 2010. Pp. xviii, 452; maps, charts, photographs, bibliography, index. \$112.00 paper.

Many edited volumes are patchy constellations of case studies around a central theme. This volume is refreshingly coherent and consistent, to the degree that each case study chapter discusses the same topics in the same order and format. The book is based on the work of a cohort of graduate students under editor Tobias Haller’s supervision and coordination at the University of Zurich, 2002–2005 (indeed, the volume reads at times as a condensed graduate seminar). Although the volume is narrowly focused on African wetlands, its theoretical ambition is the assertion of a general model of environmental and institutional change in postcolonial sub-Saharan Africa. The volume is inspired by Elinor Ostrom’s contributions to New Institutional Economics, which center on the institutional

Copyright of International Journal of African Historical Studies is the property of African Studies Center and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.