**Kenneth N. Ngwa, Aliou Cissé Niang, and Arthur Pressley (eds.). 2023. *Life Under the Baobab Tree: Africana Studies and Religion in a Transitional Age.* New York: Fordham University Press. 432 pp.**

In 2017, a group of scholars gathered at Drew University for an Africana colloquium. This was intended as a "twenty-first century conversation of and by (African) diaspora voices" (p. 1). The organizers chose the baobab tree as a symbol of "sturdiness and variation" evoking the steadfastness of scattered Africans facing multiple challenges in hostile environments (p. 4). Papers from the colloquium were published six years later in *Life Under the Baobab Tree*, which consists of fifteen chapters divided into three sections. Part 1 contains five chapters and examines "un/folding identities." Of special interest is Arthur Pressley's discussion in Chapter 1 of the novel *Quicksand*, using it as a lens for analyzing racial identity, which he terms "often a shaming and traumatic process" (p. 52). Part 2 adds five more chapters grouped under the heading of "Africana Activism." Noteworthy is Minenhle Khumalo's question—"Must we burn Isaac?" (Chapter 10). Khumalo ably re-examines the story of Hagar and Ishmael (Genesis 16). Seeing this abused mother and son as symbolic of the historic mistreatment of Black communities, they question the traditional interpretation that portrays God as merciful toward them. Instead, they contend that God uncharitably took the side of the oppressor, hardly a praiseworthy act (p. 257). Part 3 concludes the collection with a final set of five chapters labeled "Africana Historiographies and Memories." In Chapter 12, Shola Adegbite shines by retelling the tale of Jonah with reference to Mami Wata, a feminine water spirit/deity known to coastal West Africans (p. 313). They consider their re-shaping of the story an attempt to take seriously their own Africanness and a "call to empower and be empowered by African readers of the Bible, trained and untrained alike" (p. 319).

While the topics presented in the book are wide-ranging, a recurring theme is the validation of African Traditional Religions. Rachel Harding laments the "neo-Evangelical Protestant attacks against religions of African origin" (p. 226). In defense of Candomblé—an Afro-Brazilian religion with "West and Central African understandings of the world"—she notes its community-building role and how it has served to empower women (p. 225). Likewise, Althea Spencer Miller critiques how European civilization used the Bible as a "mechanism of social control" (p. 278). She details aspects of Myal, an Afro-Jamaican religion, which include "catching Myal spirit," being possessed by ancestral spirits (p. 282). Practice of such religions with African origins became a way of withstanding "Euro-Christian dominance" (pp. 285-86). In the same way, Salim Faraji contrasts "African Traditional Worldviews" and "Euro-Christian traditions" (p. 345).

Notably absent in the narrative offered by Harding, Miller, and Faraji is any critical evaluation of the idea that Christianity is "European." Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has eloquently spoken of the "danger of a single story." It can be questioned whether *Life Under the Baobab Tree* has fallen into the single-story trap by presenting Christianity merely as a tool of European colonial oppression, overlooking its historic Middle Eastern/North African origins or its positive social impact wherever it has spread, whatever its perceived negative effects might have been.

A further point of interest in *Life Under the Baoaob Tree* is the contribution of former Senegalese President Léopold Sédar Senghor. In Chapters 5 and 7, Aliou Cissé Niang lays out how Senghor underscored the importance of peace and love as taught by both Christianity and Islam, and how these concepts resonate with African values, or Africanité (pp. 207-12). Referencing Senghor, Niang speaks of our "common humanity" as a "quintessential dimension of life indispensable for practicing and (sic) lasting peace" (p. 197). They present a fascinating portrait of Senghor, one sure to entice the reader to learn more about this underappreciated African thinker and leader.

*Life Under the Baobab Tree* makes an important and scholarly contribution to the growing field of Africana studies. Its breadth is admirable, and the inclusion of three Pamela Mordecai poems, one at the start of each section, eases the reader into the subject under consideration. Minor errors include a case of dittography on p. 42 and a missing full stop on p. 333. These, however, are only small blemishes in a well-organized and edited collection that will spark interest for those seeking greater understanding of a traditional African religious worldview.

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