

Recent Publications

BOOK REVIEWS

Research Priorities in African Literatures.

Ed. by Bernth Lindfors. Munich: Saur, 1984. 222p. \$27. ISBN 3-598-10570-3.

A dearth of basic research tools seems to beset the freshly established field of study of African literatures. Also lacking is a universally accepted, paradigmatic definition of the extent and limits of the field. Should African literatures be studied as a composite subject or as national literatures? If the former, what holds them together as a continental whole? And for that matter, why did European scholars of literature fail to produce a field of European literatures but instead produced a field of comparative literatures with its own specific methodology? If African literatures are to be studied, as for the most part is accepted today, as national literatures, what is to be done with the multiethnic and multilingual character of these nation states whose formation was an artificial legacy of colonial domination? So far the majority of African literary works studied outside Africa have fallen into categories of Anglophone, Francophone, and Lusophone African literatures, but the production of works in African literatures is becoming increasingly hard to ignore. African writers on their part are greatly concerned with the need to shift from a non-African readership and a theoretical approach to a direct involvement with a local readership and the consequent necessity to address directly the problems, needs, and aspirations of the people with whom they share their language and culture and from whom they draw their inspiration. After a period in which they seemed to take stock of their historical roots and proclaim to the world the rising

of a powerful new consciousness, the writers of Africa are turning inwards to serve the contemporary cultural needs of their communities, to lay open the intricate but familiar cultural paths that led them to their present state. Hence the re-discovery and recuperation, the scholarly use of the rich inventive traditions of oral literature spanning a wide range of genres and techniques.

In order to aid and study such an extensive literary production, a whole array of critical and methodological scholarship has arisen inside and outside Africa. Its reach and usefulness, however, have encountered difficulties of financial, organizational, and sociopolitical nature: difficulties in obtaining funds, particularly by African libraries; the low priority of meeting literary needs on the part of budgetary officials; the lack of systematic bibliographic coverage; the lack of translations and linguistic instructional tools; the lack of a centralized information-gathering and -retrieving facility. All of these and a persistently obscure vision on the part of non-Africans of the specific contexts of which literary works arise impede the progress of a scholarly treatment of such works. Mindful of these obstacles, the African literatures scholars have devoted their energies to the organization of existing bibliographic aids and production of new ones. They have also gathered in an association (African Literature Association—ALA) for the purpose of pooling strengths, sharing information, and laying the basis of future research.

With these goals in mind a group of these scholars met at the Africa Centre in London on May 30-31, 1983. The result of

the conference is aptly summarized in the book under review by one of the eminent scholars in the field, Bernth Lindfors. His slim volume provides many services at once. It is a statement of research priorities on the part of a representative mix of African literatures specialists. It is a succinct compendium of bibliographic data embedded in a meaningful text. It is also somehow a harbinger of future developments in African literatures that can be culled out of the strong feelings expressed by the few African participants in favor of an Afro-centric, historical and social use of African literary works on their own terms, as opposed to the aesthetic and abstractly "universal" epistemological approach to which these works have been subjected by non-African idealist critics. Finally, the book is a multiple approach manual for beginners, for the budding student of African literatures who is able to glance at the vast subject under the guidance of experts themselves struggling to produce the tools by which analysis, interpretation, and comparison are possible. By almost unanimous agreement, the 1983 London conference participants designated the following to be top research priorities; (1) achievement of bibliographic control now scattered and incomplete; (2) desirability of centralizing the growing body of bibliographic and biographic data; (3) provisions for instruction in new research methodologies in the same center, such as computer assisted techniques; (4) instruction and linguistic research in African languages and systematic translation programs of works produced by African writers. Just as unanimous was the realization that the funds necessary to implement these programs would not become easily available. Considering that this volume is a collection of merely sixteen papers, it goes a long way to give the reader a guide for a better understanding of the cultural realities teeming within the fifty states of contemporary Africa. Indeed, even the seasoned researcher will find considerable insights in the section devoted to literature in Hausa, Somali, Portuguese, and Southern African languages. Those who want to go further can turn to the excellent quarterly journal, *Re-*

search in African Literatures published by the University of Texas Press since 1970. While it may not be practical here to name the titles of general and specialized bibliographies, one must cite the *African Book Publishing Record*, published quarterly since 1975 by Hans Zell, which is restricted to books published in Africa. The *Africana Index*, edited by Colin Darch, lists journals published in Africa. Of the specialized bibliographies, the only one with a global focus is *Bibliographies for African Studies 1980-83* compiled by Yvette Scheven. Hans Zell and others have compiled the most useful *A New Reader's Guide to African Literature* published by Africana in New York in 1983. Finally one may recommend the work of the African Literature Association and its *ALA Bulletin*, a quarterly edited by Stephen Arnold, the University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada T6G E6.—Hans E. Panofsky, *Northwestern University Library, Evanston, Illinois.*

Frale, Ruth A., and Carol Lee Anderson.

Library Space Planning: How to Assess, Allocate, and Reorganize Collections, Resources, and Physical Facilities. New York: Neal-Schuman, 1985. 158p. \$35. LC 84-18996. ISBN 0-918212-44-8.

Library Space Planning touches on many of the planning details encountered during planning for reorganization, expansion, and addition of library space, including budgeting for the party at completion of the project, pizza and all. It is based on the librarian authors' direct experiences, made the more poignant by citing mistakes, perhaps theirs, and/or those of others.

The library space planner in this book is the library director or a staff member assigned the job of space planner for the duration of the project, putting aside other responsibilities temporarily. These technically inexperienced individuals check floor loading, electrical power, and even rent cranes, activities normally delegated to professionals for reasons of safety, if nothing else. Occasional references are made to the use of the services of an architect or an electrician, none to those of a professional library planner, an engineer, nor a construction contractor. A more de-