

HST 142
BOOK REVIEW GUIDELINES
Fall 2018

- **Assignment:** write a book review of Philip Zachernuk, *Colonial Subjects: An African Intelligentsia and Atlantic*
- **Due Date:** MONDAY OCTOBER 22, 2018
- **Length:** 5-7 pages, typed, double-spaced, with standard margins.
- **Format:** 1. Approximately one-third to one-half of your review should explain the argument of the book AND the evidence on which it is based. 2. In the remaining portion of the review, you should critically assess and analyze the contents of the book and discuss their significance. What contribution does the book make to African history, how does it do so, and by what methodology? What are the author's most important contributions? What are the weaknesses of the book?
- In general, your book review should not be a simple SUMMARY of the book you have read. You must instead write an analysis of the author's argument(s) and major findings, based on a careful and close reading of the book. You will of course need to discuss what is IN the book, but, try and use this discussion as a jumping off point to explore more important issues, including:
 1. What is the author's argument [what is he trying to prove?]
 2. What are his sources, what evidence does he use [e.g. what are they? How well does he use them?]
 3. What does the book contribute to the broader field of Nigerian and African History?
 4. Be sure to include your own opinions and assessment of the quality of the book. Do NOT simply write, "I liked the book," but offer informed opinions [why do you "like" or "dislike" the book related directly to the author's analysis of the past] supported by evidence from text.

**BOOK REVIEW: PHILLIP ZACHERNUK, COLONIAL SUBJECTS: *AN AFRICAN
INTELLIGESTA AND ATLANTIC IDEAS.***

Zuming Hu

HST142

20/10/2018

Executive summary

The colonial subjects: *An African Intelligentsia and Atlantic Ideas*, is written by Philip Zachernuk to show what he thought of the change that took place in West Africa and his thoughts on Nigerian intelligentsia. The book has six chapters which explain the race to civilization, cooperation and also tells who the nationalists in Nigeria are. It is a reflection of the 19th century and the early to the mid-20th century which saw education and religion introduced to Africa. The basis of the book, Colonial Subjects is a period when the African countries were facing colonialism and slave trade from the Europeans. The book emphasizes the way the intelligentsia were on a mission to westernize Africa. The manner in which they immersed themselves in the purpose of the British how they were motivated by trying to change the Africans way this was all part of the intelligentsia ways of getting Africa to embrace westernization. It is however clear from the book that the intelligentsia's terms were favorable for both economics and politics. They were seen to look to the western ideas for inspiration so that they used them to create new ideas for themselves and to help in having a competitive advantage in their lives. Phillip shows how the Nigerians were introduced to religious and educational literature by the 19th century and they could afford to order books with so much ease. It gives us a reflection of how the educated black people of the African diaspora viewed Africa and the difference between their sight and that of the Europeans.

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they existed
 before - I think you
 mean (western
 education)

This is like
 but in a history paper
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explain

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Phillip S. Zachernuk, *Colonial Subjects: An African Intelligentsia and Atlantic Ideas*.

The colonial subjects: *An African Intelligentsia and Atlantic Ideas*, is an insight into the history of West Africa to be ^{especially} precise Nigeria. The book aims to give a different view of the pre-colonial times and shows ^{how} the African Americans and Europeans viewed Africa. The African diaspora who lived on the shores of the Atlantic was also known as the intelligentsia of the age. They ^{made} their contribution to the history of Africa especially after being educated in Sierra Leone. People like Samuel Ajayi Crowther who was saved from slavery studied and brought the evangelical fervor from England to Sierra Leone. Intelligentsias played different roles in the history of African independence. At a point, they were the intermediaries between the poor and uneducated African and the ^{the} white settlers. They also tried to establish themselves in the trade of palm oil and timber when slave trade seemed to be on the low side. The book gives several reviews of the place of the Africans was and how it influenced their decisions. The outlook of the Europeans was Africans were an inferior race and would be controlled easily. The main content of substance being the relationship between the colonialist and their subjects. The unfortunate thing was even the black Atlantic believed the same as they had come to accept the teachings they heard when in a foreign land. It is common to ask if modern Africa will be in the shape of the westerners who tried so hard to change them or if they will emerge modern but yet unmistakably African.

Review of the book

The book is set in the mid-19th century to the late 20th century, in which a big chunk of it was the invasion of the white man in the black man's world. The first chapter of the book, *invented and inventure*, sets the pace from the modern African and the rest of the world to understand what was happening in those ages. Slave trade had been going on for quite a while,

British African!

OK - explain

word

no such thing in West Africa

well, African experience of colonialism maybe?

does this not change everything - huh?

? what?

and the British anti-slave unit was liberating the Africans from these lives. The liberation of slaves is what brought about the African diaspora and the intelligentsia. They were saved and educated in Sierra Leone before they moved back to Nigeria and other parts of Africa across the world. Africans were viewed as essence and were treated with certain orientalism by both the Europeans and the African-Americans (Zachernuk, 1993). In the book we have Phillip in two instances claim that Africa has an intellectual history. This era was a time when it is thought of as a "confrontation between the indigenous and the alien new," and hence the perception of Europeans of Africa.

The black Atlantic presented themselves as people who were superior to the Africans yet still inferior to the whites. With their statuses of the middle class, they were to help bridge the gap. The chronology of events in the book, however, explains that this was not so. The intelligentsia who were to help to guide the uneducated advice failed at this. E. A. Ayandele called them "deluded hybrids mentally enslaved to foreign ideas" while Basil Davidson claimed that the problem with Africa was the "poverty of speculative thought." Phillip tries to bring the book to a term of 'conversion and conservation' of the African heritage to the western view of the world. With the Europeans aiming to "reduce colonial subjects to essences" it is proven in the book that they came to convert what they believed to be an inferior people. The trail to assimilate the members of the intelligentsia community entirely was the first step, but unfortunately very few were willing to partake in the process. The spread of religion was the next step in the process of conversion from African beliefs. The colonial intelligentsias, on the other hand, used their knowledge to gain a competitive advantage over the others (Zachernuk P., Colonial Subjects: An African Intelligentsia and Atlantic Ideas, 2000).

explains

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explains

explains

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The third chapter, *the sphinx must solve her own riddle*, Philip explains how the educated Africans were involved in the colonial order by the Europeans. This inclusion of the intelligentsia was on the political and the economic merit as it was the Europeans that bought timber, palm oil, and cotton for them in exchange for anything foreign. The intelligentsia, on the other hand, found a way to be both embedded in Nigeria while remaining to be a part of the intellectual Atlantic. Phillip shows how they never accepted being Africa entirely even though they had a role to play with the colonialists. With this new developments, Philips explains that the African values changed from the Nigerian and West African needs and started being the needs of the Europeans and African-American. The main fundamentals of the colonial administration were felt by the poor farmers and these brought with it economic depression which later led to the diversification of economic activities. The fourth chapter *pragmatic prescription*, explains the plight of the educated Africans who had then become quite a large number. He shows how the Africans "fixed themselves against the Atlantic tides" and were now anti-Europeans led by the young men who had an education. Phillip's book is all about the positivity of the colonial period as well as the role the educated blacks played that led to the colonial and post-colonial period. It is an insight into the parts different people played to make Africa what it is today.

Handwritten notes: *ex-...* (next to paragraph 1), *needs more...* (next to paragraph 4), *posit-* (next to paragraph 4)

Analysis of the book

Contributions to Africa's history and methodology

The book brings out the pre-colonial period and shows the positivity of how things changed in Africa. The Europeans, especially the British had liberated people who had been sold to slavery and educated them hence giving them a place in the society. The likes of Samuel Ajayi Crowther was trained and later became the first black Anglican bishop in 1864. Edward Wilmart

Blyden was known for the assertion of the pride of Africa, and several other people were seen to be the voice of reason and towering figures of West Africa. Even though they were seen to have failed their people except for a few they had their significance in writing the history of modern Africa.

The intelligentsia were seen to make significant changes in Nigeria and at a point were even used to advise the communities in which they were a part of on how to deal with the colonialists. The relationship between the colonialists and their subjects is explained extensively. Trade between Africans and the Europeans improved significantly and helped place West Africa in the economic globe. The presence of raw materials in Africa made more traders come to Africa and hence the financial status of the people improved. It is also clear from the book that through the educated Africans, the colonial period which was meant to convert the Africans did not work. Instead, they embraced what they learned took them and turned them into new ideas and maintain their race.

The book is a mixture of research from the books written in the past and the post-colonial period. Its main advantage is that it provides an insight into the colonial period that has not been put into much consideration. Africans are seen as the collaborators or the resisters of the colonial period. The presence of educated Africans in the late 19th century brings more insight into how West Africa is and explains why Nigeria is perceived the way it is compared to previous knowledge.

Author's important contributions

The author has purposed in the book to grasp the intellectual nature of the Africans, especially during the pre-colonial era. How they reacted to being colonial subjects and how the

intelligentsias viewed the system and what they did about it. He is out to show how the intelligentsias were at first view as enemies and brainwashed hybrids and later in the 1960s when these dreams collapsed. Intelligentsias in pre-colonial Africa was seen as the people who had the western knowledge and would help Africa and Nigeria to be specific in the guidance to the new world order. It is also to prove the 'Hamitic hypothesis' which states that "the assertion of Africa's history has been made only by foreigners" (Zachernuk P. , 1994). Several writings have been written to address the issue with some supporting the hypothesis and others not. It is, however, possible that the West Africans definition of themselves right when they say they are "degenerate heirs of classical civilization." Phillips views are critical just as Blyden's, Ladipo Solake and Biobaku.

The Weakness of the book

The book concentrates on the positivity of the presence of the Europeans in Africa, especially western Africa. It, however, does not mention the shortcomings of the missionary and colonialists. The author has concentrated on what the intelligentsias did for West Africa but does not explain the consequences like the land grabbing and the strict rule they imposed on the Africans. The educators acted as a bridge to their fellow Africans, but even they considered themselves superior hence making them above the typical black man. The book is well detailed on the lives of intelligentsias and the changes that they motivated in the country but at the same time it does not give the other side of the story hence a loophole is found in the book.

Reader's opinion

I liked the book as I saw an insight into the way the Europeans and the black Atlantics viewed the Africans. It explains the reactions of the colonial subjects and how they reacted to the

presence of the Europeans. These are some of the crucial pieces of information that I have come across in the book. It helps realize why Africa is what it is as it is an image of its history and the decisions its leaders decided to make when the colonialists arrived. I am not quite sure I agree with the authors painting of the colonialists as good people. Africa to Europe was to fulfill their missionary curiosities and commercial ambition. They viewed as an essence. They also came to explore the ethnographic interest that engulfed them.

Conclusions

Zachernuk is not for the idea that Africa's history is based purely on the Europeans versus Africans model that is sold over a long period. Instead he frilly believes that modern the political and the influenced behavior of the colonial subjects has a role in African history. He is also trying to determine the complexity of the colonial intelligentsia that changed the colonizer and the colonized. He firmly states that there is more to the African history than the desperate need for nationality that they acclaim to. He tries to prove that Africa is rich in content and has more strands in its history than what is known.

This is potential!
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