

## BOOK REVIEWS

*African muckracking: 75 Years of investigative journalism in Africa*

(Jacana Media, 2017, 347 pp. ISBN 978-1-4314-2586-0)

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The relationship between journalism and history has always been acknowledged, although with reservations. Indeed, some have gone as far as labelling journalists “historians of the present”. While these two disciplines are obviously distinct, there is no reason to question the assertion by Yves Lavoine that “journalists and historians know that they have one point in common: they both play a part in defining how events are presented in society.” This is the thought that came to me as I read *African muckracking: 75 Years of investigative journalism in Africa*. The book reminded me of the important arguments on how journalists play a significant role in shaping history as much as historians themselves do. That is why I read this book with great interest, even though I am in the field of history.

From reading the title of the book alone, the reader obtains an idea of its contents while also creating positive curiosity. Some of the questions I immediately had to do with which countries are featured in the book and what kind of corruption was investigated. Indeed, the cover gives a hint of some of the journalists in the book – some identifiable titans in African journalism. The table of contents presents the structure of the book which further addressed my curious questions before I even started reading.

*African muckracking* contains over 7 chapters organised into themes that give an idea of the kind of issues that were investigated. The themes are “The struggle for independence”, “The struggle for democracy”, “Health, rural affairs and the environment”, “Corruption”, “Mining”, “Women” and “Human rights”. As evident from the themes, most of the cases of muckracking are from post-colonial Africa. The editors admit this fact and claim that this is so because journalism as a field in general is still developing and not much muckracking would have been done during the colonial period.

The seven themes cover over 40 sections, each dealing with a specific case of journalism that exposed the hidden facts on a particular topic. Each of the themes has an introduction done by expert journalists on the issue under focus. The introductions create a very useful contextualisation for the themes. The cases present excerpts of or full articles on the exposé. The different articles not only show different writing styles and genres but also reveal some of the major challenges journalists have faced in trying to provide news on sensitive issues.

In its efforts to cover the continent, the book has cases from over 20 countries. Admittedly, the book could not have possibly covered all 54 African countries. Still, there is an admitted bias in the choice of countries – with South Africa having most of the cases (eight) while Nigeria is second with six. Such a decision is not well explained, leaving the reader to speculate whether South Africa has the most number of cases because it has a lot of corruption, because it may be easier to operate there or because the book is published in the country.

The first case in the book is an excerpt from Sol Plaatje's *Native life in South Africa*. It is introduced by Catherine Higgs who quotes Plaatje's biographer Brian Willan to have described the book as "the classic black political statement." Clearly, this was not a classic case of investigative journalism, but he being a journalist can be considered to have informed his writing of the book. It therefore conceptualises some of the first critical anti-colonial journalism in Africa, and certainly in South Africa.

The last case is the harrowing case of how a Tanzanian father sold his son, Adam Robert, for US\$6 000. Sadly, this is just one case amongst many showing the travails of people living with albinism in many African countries. The case of Adam reveals some how people living with albinism are condemned even by their parents from birth, yet they are highly sought after by superstitious people who believe that their body parts can be used to enhance supernatural powers. This case also claims that Tanzania has the highest rate of attacks on people living with albinism. Richard Mgamba's investigative report led not only to the arrest of the perpetrators, but government action such as appointing people with albinism in positions of political power.

Although the book is thick, it is easy to access for the ordinary reader. Since most of the writings are little excerpts, the book does not become a huge and cumbersome dossier on one issue. Instead, the editors managed to find stories that get straight to the point to get the reader's attention. Yet, the short cases

leave the reader not only intrigued but also curious to conduct their own further research on the cases that are covered. The reader can also pick themes of personal interest and does not have to read the entire book, although I would recommend it.

African Muckracking is a book that can be very valuable for history teaching and learning. Its content covers not just political, but also economic and social topics. The major advantage of such journalism-rooted writing is that it provides alternative narratives on topics that may seem to be glossed over in official history books, particularly school textbooks. This gives history teachers and students a chance to expose themselves to multiple narratives and engage with them critically. Schiffrin and Lugalambi's book is definitely worth reading.

*The rise of Africa's middle class: Myths, realities and critical engagements*

(WITS University Press, 2017, 219 pp. ISBN 978 1 77614 082 4)

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*How people categorise themselves influences the ways in which they experience their social location, and many have important consequences for political actions (p. 19).*

Henning Melber and his contributing authors in their 2017 book, *The rise of Africa's middle class: Myths, realities and critical engagements* have produced a well-considered contribution to the much popularised research foci that is Africa's middle class. The collection is notably limited in its continental reach as it primarily focused on east coast and Southern African states. However, it still has distinct sediments; yet, common understandings permeate through the layers, although some layers have more depth than others do. Overall, the book's contribution broadens the African middle class debate, moving beyond income-based markers of class and placing vivid focus on boundary work as a contextual theoretical frame to understand Africa's middle class.

The introduction by Melber provides a critical framework and reference point for the contributions in the book. It recapitulates parts of the debate emerging on the middle class(es), its intricacies and contradictions, and looks