

cotton producers, for example, which would surely be important in a volume that claims to increase our overall understanding of the central place of consumption for humanity. This is an interesting volume that makes an important contribution to our understanding of modern consumption, yet the reader is left with the feeling that consumption itself remains just as elusive.

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JoAnn D'Alisera, *An Imagined Geography: Sierra Leonean Muslims in America*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004)

D'Alisera's book is about how the Sierra Leoneans in Washington DC are coping with taking part in an emerging American Islam while at the same time are still being rooted in their homeland tradition. The Sierra Leoneans who she has worked with are at the same time helping shape a new tradition of Islam in America and being shaped by it. D'Alisera's informants were mainly male cab drivers and female street vendors who operated food carts or worked as health- or child-care providers. Religion is for Sierra Leoneans a 'focal point of transnational identity' (p. 9). Their dilemma is about combining a new Islam emerging in America, which is the work of many different Islamic communities coming from different places in the world, with what they see as the Islamic tradition rooted in Sierra Leone. Looking into the new practices that develop in America, they make a reassessment of the understanding of Islam they got in their homeland. D'Alisera collected her data over a two-year period (1991–3) while she was living among the Sierra Leonean community spread throughout the Washington DC area. By the end of her fieldwork she had interviewed and come to know several hundred people. There were about 3000 to 5000 Sierra Leoneans living in the area. Many of them fear that their children are growing up viewing themselves as American, and they do whatever they can to prevent them from becoming Americans. Some families send their children to Islamic schools in Sierra Leone, hoping that by providing them with a more conservative education they will protect them from the 'bad influences' of being brought up in America. For many Sierra Leoneans in America it is of paramount importance to be recognized as such by other Sierra Leoneans. Naming ceremonies are one of the most important markers of Sierra Leonean identity. In America, naming ceremonies lose their purity and incorporate items of the American home and lifestyle (e.g. food and clothing). They become elaborate parties through which parents show others how much they prize their children. As a consequence, the children sometimes have to wait until their parents save the money needed to host the naming ceremony. By that time the children are already in their toddlerhood, whereas according to Islamic tradition the naming must take place within days after birth.

Sierra Leoneans in America feel that their homeland is peripheral to and disconnected from the central Islamic states that define the 'true Islamic tradition'. This pushes them into a continuous redefinition of their Muslim identity vis-à-vis other Muslims with whom they have contact in mosques and Islamic centres. The sort of dilemmas faced by Sierra Leonean families is expressed, for instance, by one of D'Alisera's informants when the time comes for her to decide whether or not to send her daughter to be initiated in Sierra Leone. On the one hand, she feels an obligation to the local tradition back in the homeland; on the other, she feels the

pressure within American society, in which she takes part, that considers female circumcision an inappropriate practice. American born Sierra Leoneans are also less inclined to accept elements of a tradition that collides with American values in general or the hybrid practices of an emerging American Islam. The Islamic centre that caters for D'Alisera's Muslim informants plays a decisive role in defining what it is to be a 'proper' and 'good' Muslim. Very often, it is difficult for both men and women to reconcile the demands of their daily lives with those of being a proper Muslim. For instance, for food vendors it is particularly important that they show their hot-dogs are properly prepared with *halal* meat.

Although D'Alisera's book has a fair amount of ethnographic details, one feels some need to know how her informants fit into the wider Sierra Leonean community in Washington DC. Also, many years have passed between D'Alisera's fieldwork and the publication of her book, and one wonders whether her ethnography still stands for what it claims. Nonetheless, her work represents a good piece of ethnography and anthropological work that deserves to be read and taken into account when considering the study of Muslim communities of African origin in America.

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Alexa Bloch and Laurel Kendall, *The Museum at the End of the World: Encounters in the Russian Far East* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004)

This book is an account, in present tense vernacular, of what Ann Fienup-Riordan calls 'visual repatriation'. Written by two North American anthropologists experienced in Asia, it describes a six week visit in 1998 to the museums and the cultural centres of cities in eastern Siberia. Bloch and Kendall brought with them catalogues and CDs of the Siberian collections from the American Museum of Natural History, New York. These had been obtained at the turn of the 20th century during the Jessup Expedition, designed 'to determine the historical connections between the Native peoples' (p. ix) on both sides of Bering Strait. Not a travelogue, the text is perhaps best described as a museologue, a mission to record impressionistically post-Soviet Siberian institutions, including Native carving shops and dance schools. The personal and private trials and tribulations of those institutions, and of their employees, are well recorded in copious detail. Also included are the reactions of local people to seeing, for the first time, century-old images of Siberian ethnography from New York. Nevertheless, much of the sense of a travelogue remains, detailing fear of damp hotel rooms, of cold water and of drunk fellow guests, along with numerous thumbnail biographies of chance encounters with memorable characters met en route, and of course of food and the exigencies of travel.

Each of the nine main chapters describes brief visits to specific cities, and their ethnic hinterlands. Evocative quotes provide descriptions of people and place at the beginning of the 20th century from the Jessup records. Then the contemporary scene is introduced, with details of Soviet and post-Soviet history, and the progressive disintegration of Soviet social and economic norms. Great value is placed on encounters with other westerners, with successful members of the new Russian elite, but most emphasis is reserved for museum curators, directors and guides who