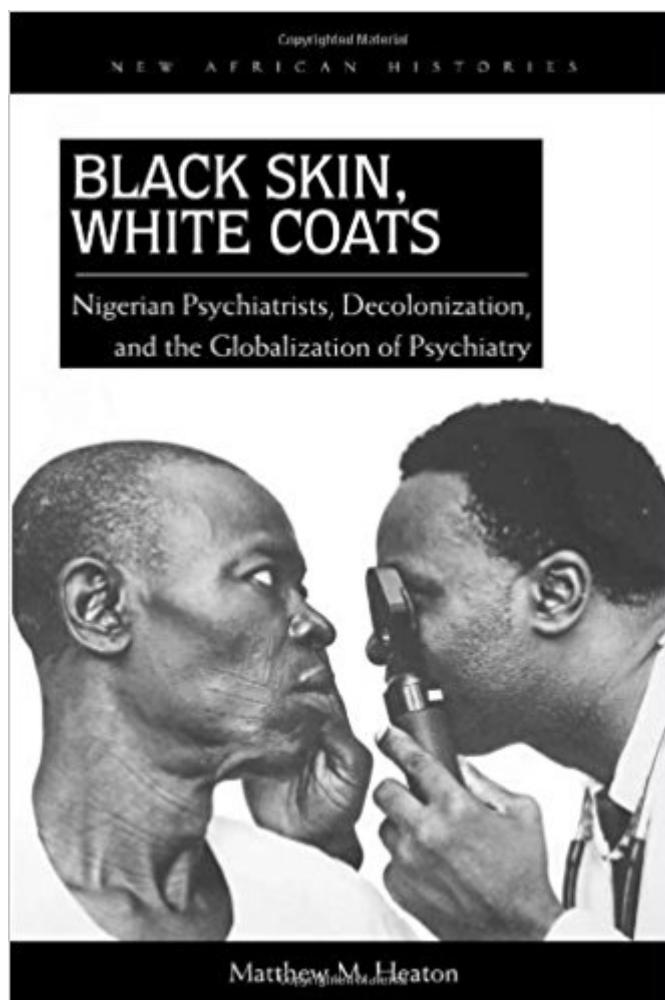


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Black Skin, White Coats: Nigerian Psychiatrists, Decolonization, And The Globalization Of Psychiatry (New African Histories)



Synopsis

Black Skin, White Coats is a history of psychiatry in Nigeria from the 1950s to the 1980s. Working in the contexts of decolonization and anticolonial nationalism, Nigerian psychiatrists sought to replace racist colonial psychiatric theories about the psychological inferiority of Africans with a universal and egalitarian model focusing on broad psychological similarities across cultural and racial boundaries. Particular emphasis is placed on Dr. T. Adeoye Lambo, the first indigenous Nigerian to earn a specialty degree in psychiatry in the United Kingdom in 1954. Lambo returned to Nigeria to become the medical superintendent of the newly founded Aro Mental Hospital in Abeokuta, Nigeria's first "modern" mental hospital. At Aro, Lambo began to revolutionize psychiatric research and clinical practice in Nigeria, working to integrate "modern" western medical theory and technologies with "traditional" cultural understandings of mental illness. Lambo's research focused on deracializing psychiatric thinking and redefining mental illness in terms of a model of universal human similarities that crossed racial and cultural divides. Black Skin, White Coats is the first work to focus primarily on black Africans as producers of psychiatric knowledge and as definers of mental illness in their own right. By examining the ways that Nigerian psychiatrists worked to integrate their psychiatric training with their indigenous backgrounds and cultural and civic nationalisms, Black Skin, White Coats provides a foil to Frantz Fanon's widely publicized reactionary articulations of the relationship between colonialism and psychiatry. Black Skin, White Coats is also on the cutting edge of histories of psychiatry that are increasingly drawing connections between local and national developments in late-colonial and postcolonial settings and international scientific networks. Heaton argues that Nigerian psychiatrists were intimately aware of the need to engage in international discourses as part and parcel of the transformation of psychiatry at home.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

“Black Skin, White Coats contributes to a rich strand of work in the history of psychiatry that highlights and in fact insists upon not just the transnational nature of colonial and postcolonial psychiatric discourses, but the fact that these transnational flows traveled in many directions and crossed borders in surprising ways, often bypassing the Metropole.” altogether [Heaton’s book] will rightfully be regarded as an important contribution to the history of psychiatry in Africa. • Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences “The book’s greatest achievement may be its demonstration that the rise and fall of social medicine in the second half of the twentieth century is not merely a story about Europeans and Americans attempting to impose their visions on the rest of the world, but also the story of a collaboration – albeit a tense, tenuous, and limited collaboration – in which Africans actively participated.” • Canadian Journal of History “An important contribution [Heaton’s Black Skin, White Coats] squarely [addresses] the impact of nationalism and decolonisation on health care in Africa. [it] uses psychiatry as a lens through which to evaluate the continuities and changes of colonialism. It has broad appeal and encourages scholars to move away from an outdated reliance on the development and spread of Western psychiatry.” • Contemporary European History “Based on solid research, Black Skin, White Coats is well written and makes for a good read, and should attract a readership in colonial studies, African history, the history of science and medicine, global studies, and development studies.” • Richard Keller, University of Wisconsin “Black Skin, White Coats is clearly written and accessible to readers who are not professional historians. While of interest to scholars of African ethno psychiatry, Heaton’s social and historical account of the period from the late 1940s to early 1980s provides an engaging narrative of the complexities of integrating Western psychiatry into an African society within a very compressed time frame. As such, the book should be of interest to a broad range of social scientists as well as the interested lay reader.” • Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry “Black Skin, White Coats uses psychiatry as a lens through which to evaluate the continuities and changes of colonialism. It has

broad appeal and encourages scholars to move away from an outdated reliance on the development and spread of “Western” psychiatry and towards a theorization of a “global” psychiatry that recognizes a greater diversity of actors. As a result, [Heaton’s] methodological approach is ripe for comparison to different diseases and public health concerns in other contexts. • Contemporary European History

Matthew M. Heaton is an assistant professor in the Department of History at Virginia Tech.

Very eye opening account of psychiatry in a colonial context that identifies complex cultural processes not readily understood in a solely European framework.

Professor Heaton’s book is a must read for anyone interested in decolonization and psychiatry. It is well written and engaging.

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