

BOOK REVIEWS

REVIEWER: BELINDA KYOMUHENDO

TITLE: BORN ON A TUESDAY

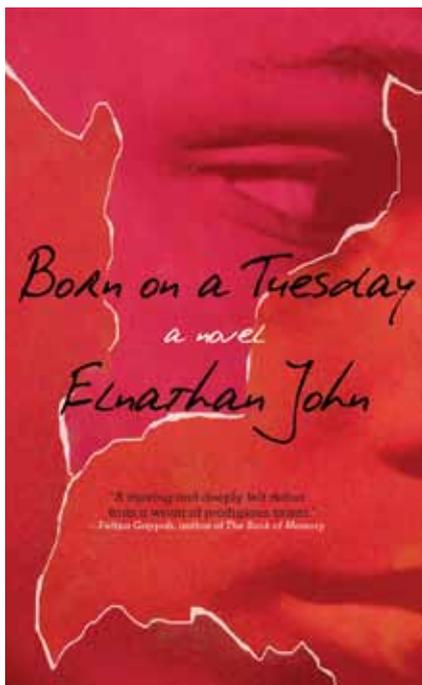
AUTHOR: ELNATHAN JOHN

From two-time Caine Prize finalist Elnathan John from Nigeria, *Born on a Tuesday* is a novel about a young boy struggling to find his place in a society that is fracturing along religious and political lines.

Dantala the protagonist, whose name translates as Born on a Tuesday, is sent away by his father to attend Qur'anic school. He falls in with a group of street boys. When they are hired by a political party to burn the headquarters of an opposition party, the police get involved and Dantala must flee to save his life. He ends up in Sokoto State, where an imam called Sheikh Jamal takes him under his wing. Here he finds some stability. But horrific things happen: prepubescent boys kill and commit atrocities for political ideologies they do not understand, and mothers depend on handouts to feed their children. Hypocrisy abounds; corruption is rife; young men are drawn to religious extremism; and there is tension between Shia and the Sunni Muslims, which threatens the life Dantala has found and the

people he has come to love.

The three people who influence his life the most at this point are perhaps the true triumph of this book. These are Sheikh Jamal, who is gentle and kind, perhaps naïve, and not in any way perfect; Malam Abdul-Nur, whose fervour in his adopted religion echoes the greatest villains in history. He is violent in his



personal life, and it translates into his religion, with his desire to punish all 'unbelievers' with violence. There is also Jubril, Abdul-Nur's brother, who becomes the greatest influence on Dantala. They help and teach each other and develop a close and admirable friendship.

This stage of Dantala's life is one many of us can identify with – learning, maturing, sexual curiosity, falling in love, and hope for the future. This book shocks from the very beginning, with the violence and the poverty, and yet the reader cannot help being moved to pity for these boys, the instruments of violence who don't know any other life. In another region, in another world, Dantala would have a chance to make something of himself, but on the lowest rung of society in northern Nigeria, everything conspires against him.

Elnathan John provides a fascinating insight into the culture of contemporary Nigeria and its religious and political upheavals through this coming-of-age story. While some portions are disturbing to read, it was well worth it. This book will stick with you long after you've finished it.

The writer works with ACFODE as a Programmes Assistant

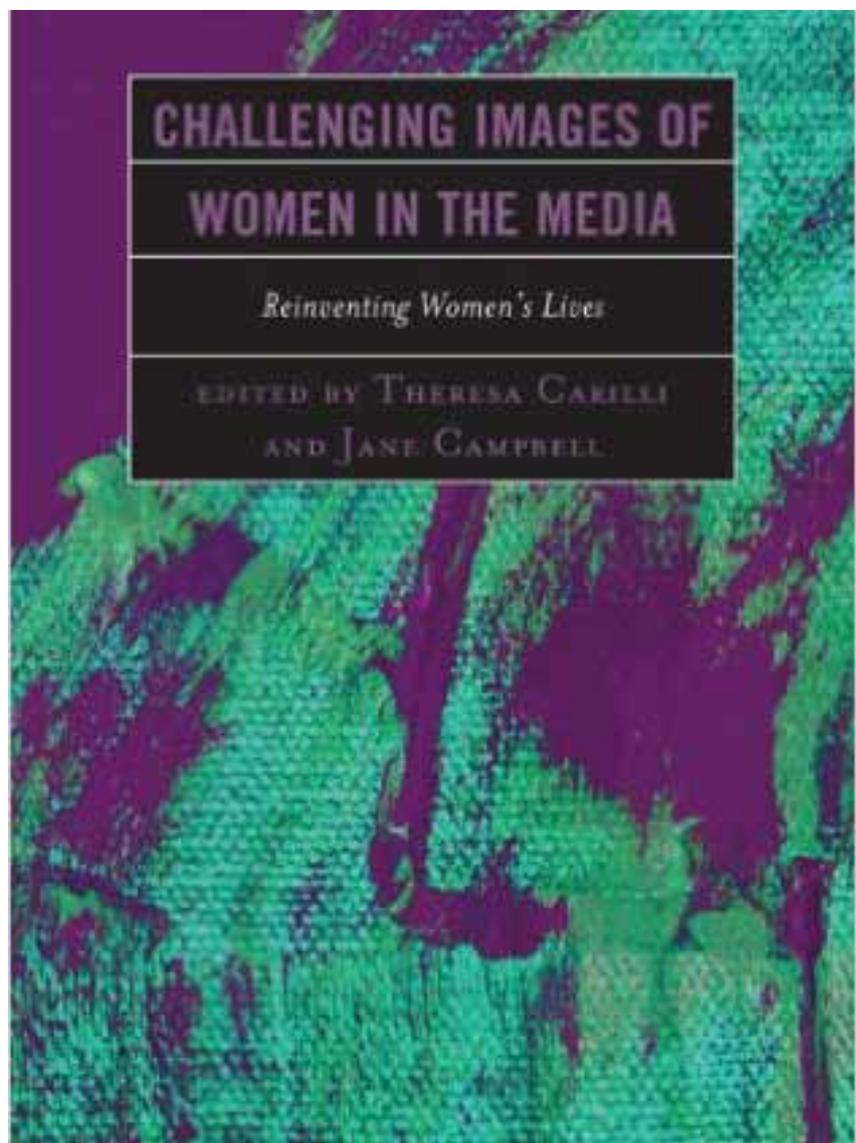
BOOK REVIEWS

CHALLENGING IMAGES OF WOMEN AND THE MEDIA: REINVENTING WOMEN'S LIVES,

CONTRIBUTOR(S): CARILLI, THERESA (EDITOR), CAMPBELL, JANE (EDITOR)

This book is a collection of fifteen articles addressing the status of women through an examination of depictions of women in the media. This in-depth study shows how mixed messages from the media mix-up attempts at breaking the 'glass screen', causing women to constantly question their role in global culture. With cake advertisements followed by diet commercials, the media's depiction of women is both confusing and contradictory.

While more and more women have begun to contribute to the media as respected anchors, talk show hosts and commentators, these portrayals are often counteracted by music videos and reality television shows such as Big Brother and Keeping up with the Kardashians. This collection seeks to analyse these depictions and their effects on women and culture. The contributors to this anthology come from such diverse locations as Japan, Australia, Pakistan, India, China, Bulgaria and the United States. With this global focus, *Challenging Images of Women in the Media* scrutinises issues of race, ethnicity, class and



sexuality through a study of gendered media portrayals. By challenging the status quo of media images, the contributors to this essential volume invite a dialogue about women's advancement.

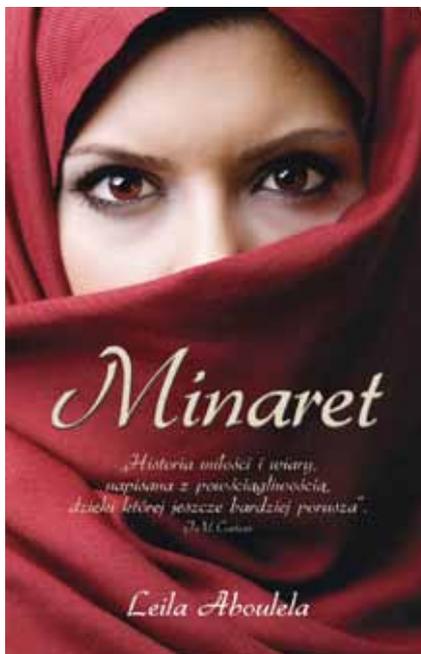
BOOK REVIEWS

TITLE: MINARET

AUTHOR: LEILA ABOULELA

Leila Aboulela's second novel, *Minaret* is a story about Najwa, an upper-class and fairly westernised Sudanese woman who moves to London and ends up as working-class. Najwa's story begins in 1984 in the Sudanese capital, Khartoum. She is the daughter of a government official close to the president, and her home is a grand house run by six servants. The family travel abroad and maintain a flat in London, but they know practically nothing about their own country outside Khartoum. Najwa studies at the university but the focus of her life is western clothes, pop music and parties. She is a Muslim, and has been brought up to follow the customary round of charitable practices, including visits to hospitals and children's homes and careful donations to the poor; but in Najwa's household only the servants actually pray.

At university she falls in love with Anwar, a fellow student. Anwar is a man of the future, a radical socialist who has nothing but disdain for the faith of the devout hijab-wearing students. When the inevitable coup occurs, Najwa's father is arrested and later executed, while the rest



of the family flee to the countryside.

In London Najwa's brother Omar becomes a drug addict, stabs a policeman in the course of an arrest and receives a long prison sentence. Her mother, the only link with her former existence, suffers a long illness and dies.

When Najwa is at her lowest ebb, another coup exiles Anwar to London. She begins an affair with him, initiating her first and only sexual experience, but realises eventually that Anwar has no

intention of marrying her. She finds the strength to give him up through her relationship with a group of women at the Regent's Park mosque, and as her disillusionment with Anwar increases, so does her reliance on her new-found faith. In the interim she has also been converted into a maid, a humble appendage to a series of Arab families.

Najwa journeys from pride and confusion to humility and peace. When she adopts the hijab she begins to see the world from a new perspective. 'These men Anwar condemned as narrow-minded and bigoted ... were tender and protective towards their wives. Anwar was clever but he would never be tender and protective.' Najwa's conversion is not an easy surrender to tradition. Instead it is a hard-won dedication to service, a kind of restitution for her former life.

Despite the complex issues she addresses, Aboulela's writing is easy and straightforward. This is a beautiful, challenging novel.