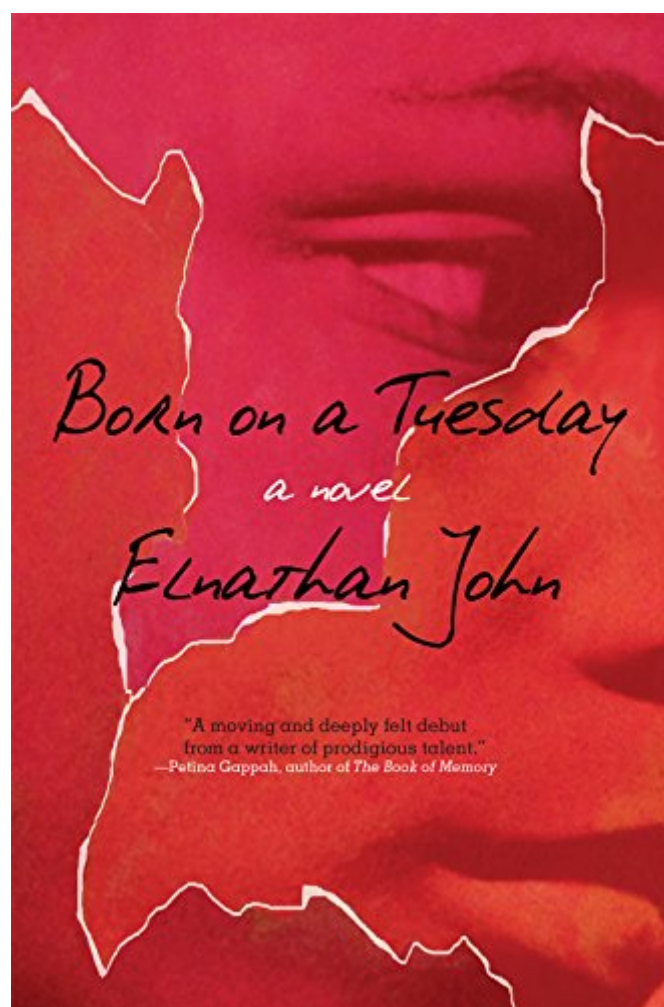


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Born On A Tuesday: A Novel



Synopsis

From two-time Caine Prize finalist Elnathan John, a dynamic young voice from Nigeria, *Born on a Tuesday* is a stirring, starkly rendered first novel about a young boy struggling to find his place in a society that is fracturing along religious and political lines. In far northwestern Nigeria, Dantala lives among a gang of street boys who sleep under a kuka tree. During the election, the boys are paid by the Small Party to cause trouble. When their attempt to burn down the opposition's local headquarters ends in disaster, Dantala must run for his life, leaving his best friend behind. He makes his way to a mosque that provides him with food, shelter, and guidance. With his quick aptitude and modest nature, Dantala becomes a favored apprentice to the mosque's sheikh. Before long, he is faced with a terrible conflict of loyalties, as one of the sheikh's closest advisors begins to raise his own radical movement. When bloodshed erupts in the city around him, Dantala must decide what kind of Muslim he wants to be and what kind of man he wants to be. Told in Dantala's naïve, searching voice, this astonishing debut explores the ways in which young men are seduced by religious fundamentalism and violence.

Book Information

File Size: 1728 KB

Print Length: 256 pages

Publisher: Grove Press, Black Cat (May 3, 2016)

Publication Date: May 3, 2016

Sold by: Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B01AGZ8LPO

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #110,959 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #48

in Books > Literature & Fiction > World Literature > African #1708 in Kindle Store > Kindle

eBooks > Literature & Fiction > Genre Fiction > Coming of Age #2233 in Books > Literature &

Fiction > Genre Fiction > Coming of Age

Customer Reviews

Born on a Tuesday follows young Ahmad Dantala, an Islamic Nigerian, as he is swept up by violence and corruption, runs from bullets, finds refuge in a mosque, and tries to fight the temptations that make teenage boys tremble in the night. In the mosque, Dantala struggles with English and friendship, both of which he shares with an abused boy named Jabril. As is common in novels of this nature, he questions some of the harsher interpretations of Islamic law. He becomes deputy to a Sheikh who guides his lessons. He also discovers that there is corruption in Nigeria. Who knew? Dantala's struggle eventually puts him in the middle of competing religious and governmental factions. Born on a Tuesday positions Dantala as a symbolic representative of peaceful people everywhere who become the victims of power struggles spawned by zealots. Much of the novel's background concerns the struggle between two opposing views of Islam, one that wants to separate itself from the Nigerian government and oppose it violently, and one that wants to work within the Nigerian government to influence institutions and bring about change. The conflict makes Dantala wonder how Muslims can respond to people fighting them all over the world when they are constantly fighting among themselves. The conflict spills into Dantala's life in many ways, particularly in the effect it has on his friend Jabril. Another religious struggle that the book touches upon (although not too deeply) involves the conflict between Sunni and Shia within Nigeria. The primary background element involves the Nigerian Army's massacre of the Shia. Since this is a coming-of-age novel, Dantala does the things that boys do, including having sex with a prostitute and touching himself, actions that his religion forbids.

I wasn't sure what to expect from this novel. I the Goodread.com giveaway for this book because I'm making a conscious effort to expose myself to works from authors from different cultures and worldviews than my own. The author here is a Nigerian lawyer, which certainly meets that criteria, so I was hoping that this book might give me some idea of what life might be like for someone from his world. And I wasn't disappointed. This is a well written story that takes the reader into northern Nigeria and immerses us in the Muslim culture of that region. The narrator is a young man named Dantala, who comes of age against the backdrop of the rhythms of Muslim life, and the political and religious conflicts that are brewing in his nation. As the book opens, Dantala is living on the streets with a gang that has been recruited to cause trouble during an election. But when things get horribly out of control, Dantala flees, eventually finding sanctuary under the supervision of a friendly sheikh at a mosque in another city. As the conflicts between different interpretations of Islam grow, Dantala must decide what he believes and where he will stand. He begins to contemplate his future—what will he do, and who will he do it with. Will he marry? Or will

events take those decisions out of his hands? Written from a first person perspective, this story feels like an eyewitness account of the unraveling of a society as it descends into anarchy and violence. We get little understanding of the larger forces at play, for the simple reason that the narrator doesn't have any such understanding. Instead, we share his experiences from his limited viewpoint, with his visceral fear and confusion.

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