REVIEWS

AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A PIONEER


Readers of this journal surely need no introduction to the author of this autobiography. Yet, they will value access to a most readable and comprehensive chronicle of the life and work of Professor Roland A. Oliver, from his birth in March 1923 in Srinagar through his second marriage in July 1990 in the English countryside.

It is somewhat embarrassing to turn the first pages of an autobiography written by someone one has known, and esteemed, for some decades. But this is a remarkable book unfolding the lines of development of an important field of academic learning and training from its first uncertain steps in the late 1940s through its full and impressive institutionalization in universities, institutes and academies on several continents. Roland Oliver was present, formative, influential and observant at many, many important moments and turns in the development of a modern, professional field of African history. His reflections and remembrances offer present and future students and practitioners a map of the field’s development, not just in the United Kingdom but on the European continent and North America, and especially in Africa. It is a history of a discipline in the dress of a history of a life.

What readers have admired elsewhere – Oliver’s capacity to bring within one voice a density of detail, an assured synthetic comprehension and an open and unencumbered fluency of presentation – is also to be found here. So much has changed in the academic field of which Oliver is one of the best recognized and most accessible founding authors, and so much has changed in Africa in the four or so decades that constitute the book’s core chronological frame. However, the beautifully direct and jaunty style, with authority married to a certain whimsy, that Oliver and John Fage achieved in their extraordinarily precocious A Short History of Africa (1962), and that Oliver deployed in his public lectures, has not been lost as the eye has turned inward.

In the Realms of Gold bridges several genres of writing familiar to students of Africa. There is the intrepid and spirited travel of the explorer literature of the nineteenth century. Oliver and his first wife, Caroline Linehan Oliver, travel roads and sites not previously visited by professional historians, from their first land-falls on the continent in 1948 to their drive across what is today politically and otherwise impassable terrain from Stanleyville to Kampala. One is taken into a geography of missionary stations and reminded of how different the possibilities for academic travel are in Africa today. And there is a thread of de Tocqueville, in the recurrent reflections by Oliver on the state of American institutions of higher learning. There is the imperial memoir, getting within the framework of one volume privileged and influential overseas experience at innumerable sites. The author’s life itself constitutes a lattice connecting many different institutional developments: from the birth of this journal to the evolution of the Cambridge History of Africa, to the workings of the British Institute in Eastern Africa, to the generation of the Minority Rights Group, with stops at virtually every important historical conference on the African continent. And there is the difficult poetics of post-colonial
reflection, as Oliver steers between long sustained optimism (and a will to
optimism) and the feelings of despair for a continent in trouble. It is not the first
such memoir by an academic – one hopes there are many more – but there may be
few others that so strongly evoke the assembly of tensions and possibilities, and
contradictions, of these typically distinctive modes of address to Africa.

In the Realms of Gold draws readers into the author’s newly awakening interests
in the investigation of early Iron Age Africa. Given the topics of Oliver’s early
scholarship on the imperial and missionary frontiers of Africa, such an interest
should have been testing if not also surprising. But Oliver engaged with this field
and enlarged its significance beyond the specialized conversations among archae-
ologists. He did this through interdisciplinary seminars, lectures and conferences,
through his speculative writings and synthetic works (with heady debates
nourished by this very journal), and through his devotion to the British Institute in
Eastern Africa, which has supported research across five or six countries for over
four decades. Here we see Oliver most at ease in questioning and revising, over the
years, his own ideas in light of new data and more powerful hypotheses. We see
Oliver thrilled by the archaeological work of Mark Horton on the East African
coast and we see very different reflections on his singular visit to Olduvai Gorge.

We may be startled to learn of the facility and speed deployed by Oliver and Fage
in the authoring of A Short History of Africa, with each of the co-authors in the
summer of 1961 working at an amazing pace, nearly managing to write a chapter
per week, as Oliver put words to paper in ‘a modest caravan’. These were the
temporary living quarters of the Olivers at Frilsham, before the construction of the
warm and endearing home and workshop for historical writing and editing that
would be known as Frilsham Woodhouse. We see the formation of an editorial
structure and process for the Cambridge History of Africa, with hints of some of the
difficulties and controversies that developed within and around the project. And
we see the strong challenges to Oliver and colleagues of SOAS, faced on the one
side by students essentially in revolt and, on the other, by the British government’s
increasing involvement in the everyday world of higher education. Oliver has
provided here the outlines of a body of work, its rhythms, its transitions, some
glimpses of the backstage. Much will be fleshed out, and certainly debated, by
future students who examine closely the institutional and intellectual trajectories
of African studies from the 1940s onwards, at SOAS, in African institutions and
beyond.

Perhaps most arresting in In the Realms of Gold are the recurring tensions within
two most difficult balancing acts: chapter by chapter, one sees Oliver struggling to
sustain a balance between the demands and opportunities of a rich and rewarding
life as a core figure in the emergence of the academic field of African history and
and in the continued vitality and value of African historical studies at SOAS and the
needs for his presence at home with Caroline requiring increasing support and
assistance in virtually every aspect of her life through to her passing in December
1983. Further, chapter by chapter, one sees Oliver as one of the formative figures
in the development of African-based scholarship and departments of history on the
African continent, as the doctor–father of scores of leading younger historians of
the continent who have looked to ‘Professor’ as a source of continuing support and
authority as he has looked to them as bearers of the mantle of leadership in a next
generation. At several points in the volume, Oliver – drawing on his own
correspondence, notes, engagement books and memory – reflects from different
temporal and situational vantage points on the economic and institutional
challenges faced by these younger scholars in assuming this mantle. Especially
poignant are his reflections on visiting his former protégés in their universities in
Africa two to three decades after completing their dissertations at SOAS and after
assuming key posts in new universities and new departments. Oliver offers much
detail on the calamity of the academy in Africa, but holds off assigning any singular explanation for what he sees as broad waves of change and decadence. A larger history, of which Oliver is much more an acute observer than a central participant, is called for, if not in some ways already in construction.

One hopes, and assumes, that historians of Africa, and their close colleagues, who have looked to Roland Oliver for uniquely accessible and valuable sight-lines into Africa’s past, will find this autobiography both invaluable and premature, and that we may see continuing scholarship and leadership from this extraordinary historian.

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DAVID WILLIAM COHEN

A MONUMENTAL WORK


The Inner Niger Delta occupies a very special place in the history of West Africa. It saw its earliest urbanization (before or by 400 A.D.). As the ‘island of gold’ it became the hub of a trading network that affected western west Africa to c. 1600, to and from which flowed various goods, ideas, beliefs, practices, value systems and a Mande way of life. The north-western part of the region may even have been the core of the great empire of Ghana (pp. 253–8) while later Timbuktu became the main local intellectual centre of Islam. Moreover, recent and ongoing research, not least by the McIntosh team itself, keeps transforming our understanding of the history of the area. Hence the importance of a new book about it, and the high expectations its coming arouses.

This work fully meets those expectations, albeit in an idiosyncratic way. Its author provides a well documented historical overview, but only as a ‘case study’ (p. 9) for the discussion of general archaeological theories about the growth of complexity. His book contains, in fact, three intertwined strands: an historical reconstruction focused on the six basins of the Middle Niger, an argument about the reconstruction of history and a new general archaeological theory.

All of which makes for an ambitious, provoking and hence challenging book. Its first chapter introduces the main ‘themes’ of the whole work, to wit: how the need to cope with climatic unpredictability in a special high-risk environment has shaped the social structures of its inhabitants (pp. 1–6); the importance of ethnicity; the notion of a ‘symbolic reservoir’ of ‘deep-time’ Mande values undergoing ‘layered transformation’ over time (pp. 5, 14); the predominance of early ‘civil society’ (p. 6) or political heterarchy (government by juxtaposition) as opposed to hierarchy (government by subordination), heterarchy being better adapted to cope with the needs for change and the creation of complexity than hierarchy would be; synoecism (a theory of the process of living together) which argues that continuous interactive development of environmental, ecological and social agencies (pp. 18–19, 281) leads to common transformations and often increasing complexity, a theory that is far more convincing than Neo-Evolutionism (p. 11); and expressions of historical imagination, including an attempt to render Mande social memory (p. 29).

With this the stage is set. The following chapters all occur in pairs. Every chapter that deals with a historical topic is followed by one in which a fictional vignette recasts its main themes. The order of topics is only partially chronological. Thus twin chapters about remote beginnings in the two dry basins of the Middle Niger to c. 2000 B.C. are followed by a pair in which the first one deals with the
landscapes of the four live basins and its uses by people all the way to a recent past, while its twin presents a snapshot c. 300 B.C. The next two pairs cover early settlements and their economy in the deep basins to about 400 A.D., then the rise of an urban network and long distance trading connections to c. 1000 A.D. ‘The imperial tradition’ follows. It deals in succession with the demographic collapse c. 1100–1400 A.D., the rise of empires, the role of trade and the long-term persistence of an imperial tradition. Its companion chapter recreates Sonni Ali Ber’s magical preparations for the conquest of Jenne in 1472. An epilogue then argues for the resilience of the principle of heterarchy all the way up to the present.

Like a chameleon this book takes on a different colouring according to the background of its readers, but often its colouring is not protective but provocative. Archaeologists will see it as a crucial contribution to the theoretical fundamentals of their discipline, political scientists as a theory about government, cultural anthropologists as a claim to the dynamic tenacity of a cultural core. Historians will evaluate it as a synthesis of the history of a (?the) core area in the Mande world, distrust its use of fiction and remain circumspect about ethnographic evidence unless other data can back it up (e.g. pp. 13, 178). Yet this book will inspire many scholars for many years to come, precisely because it has much to say to so many.

For a historian, its most provoking aspects are the chapters expressing the historical intuitions of the author in fiction. One can appreciate the attempt to render the place of intuition in historical reconstruction more transparent and the pedagogical advantages of fiction. Nevertheless most historians shudder at this practice because it tends to erase the distinction between an exposition based on evidence and fiction, an erasure invariably made by the general public for whom such fiction is ‘historical truth’. Also there are the inevitable psychological anachronisms (e.g. ‘civil society’) that always contaminate such fiction.

Then historians wonder at what cost the goals of this work have been achieved. To use a ‘case study’ implies that history will be subordinated to a theoretical discourse and that the narrative historical explanation will be short-changed. And so it is. In time this book slights the history of the area after its heyday. In space, one regrets the exclusion of the Bandiagara sites, so important for the material culture of the whole area from c. 1000 A.D. onwards. The inevitable exclusion of the Upper Niger makes it clear that this is not a study primarily focused on Mande history. Moreover, the theoretical discourse leaves its own tracks. The plea for heterarchy as shown by the lack of elite centres and the supposed presence of power associations and complementary casted corporate groups convinces. But the pleading pushes some issues into the shadows. How, one wonders, could hierarchy, as evidenced in the tumulus at El Oualadj (pp. 223–7) c. 1000 A.D., take hold in such an heterarchical environment? What about Ghana? What about the inevitable impact on government and society of the demographic collapse after c. 1000? Should this be linked for instance to the Islamisation of Jenne or to the rise of Mali? The collapse itself is unconvincingly attributed to a ‘Black Death’, (pp. 247–50). Instead could it be but the consequence of a changing climate and political landscape?

Yet, flaws and all, this is a monumental work of lasting value. Its impressive grand vision, backed by a flood of innovative ideas, sets an agenda and creates an interpretation that will engage scholars for decades to come.

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Jan Vansina
THE AFRICAN PAST AND THE PRESENT


How does one begin to assess Basil Davidson’s enormous contribution to African studies? In a publishing career spanning half a century and amounting to an extraordinary 27 books, he has undoubtedly become the world’s most widely read authority on Africa’s history, politics and liberation movements. Despite this achievement – or perhaps because of it – the location of this immense body of work in the context of modern African historiography remains problematic. As an avowedly popular writer determined to carry the message of African historical and cultural achievement to the broadest possible audience, Davidson’s appeal transcends the narrow confines of academia. Yet, as his searching analysis of the failure of the post-colonial nation-state The Black Man’s Burden (1992) demonstrated, his work continues both to draw from and to shape scholarly discourse. The sheer breadth and influence of his scholarship demands the engagement of professional historians, even if – as is the case with this latest offering – it is not they who are being directly addressed.

This volume is a reworked version of the hugely successful History of West Africa 1000–1800, first published in 1965 and written with the collaboration of F. K. Buah and J. F. Ade Ajayi. While the earlier work was a textbook designed for West African secondary school students, the new edition has been reconceived with non-African readers in mind. More specifically, the book appears to be aimed at ‘all those, especially, who may have imagined that pre-colonial Africans did not know how to govern themselves in peace and prosperity’ (p. 210). A recent essay in which Davidson reflects on his historiographical concerns over the years is revealing of his anxiety to continue to reach out to this lay audience. Mounting a stout defence of what one critic suggested was his ‘hopelessly sentimental’ image of pre-colonial Africa, Davidson argues that this ‘gravely unfashionable’ view remains the only weapon in the face of entrenched popular ignorance of the continent’s past achievements. A concern to reconnect the African past with the African present and African future – a connection severed by the dispossessions of colonial conquest – has animated Davidson’s project since it began in the early 1950s. How useful is West Africa Before the Colonial Era in this on-going task?

As someone actively searching for tools with which to teach a first-year undergraduate course on African history from the earliest times to 1850, my response was one of disappointment. Concisely written in the straightforward, lucid prose which has long been a hallmark of Davidson’s work, it has much to recommend it as an introductory guide to the evolution of West African civilization. What is striking, however, is how very little the content and analysis of this book has changed from that of its precursor of 1965. The problem is not the repeated emphasis on the achievements of the indigenous civilizing mission in the savannas and forests of West Africa, which undoubtedly is one of the great untold triumphs of human history. Rather, it is the precedence given to one of the institutional outcomes of this colonizing process: the state. The first half of the book is dominated by a procession of state-building projects, with chapters on ‘Pioneers in ancient Ghana’, ‘The majesty of Mali’ and ‘Songhay achievement’

forming a seamless narrative of political endeavour. In places the narrative becomes an almost *griot*-like incantation of the heroic struggles of great men like Sundiata Keita, Mansa Kankan Musa, Sunni Ali, Askia Muhammad and Mai Idris Alooma. Whereas the emphasis of recent research has been on the constraints on the accumulation of power and the uneven and ephemeral nature of political authority, Davidson continues to stress the ability of incipient bureaucratic regimes to enclose the Western Sudan ‘within a single system of law and order’ (p. 42). The decline of empires, moreover, is primarily seen as resulting from the mistakes of foolish or weak kings, such as those who succeeded Mansa Musa of Mali. Despite repeated assurances that peoples who remained aloof from the imperial systems were no less ‘intelligent or sensible’ (p. 61), they tend to emerge from the shadows only as aberrant ‘raiders’ harassing the great state-builders.

Much of this can be explained by the problem of sources and the need to compress complex events into a concise analysis. But I am not convinced that the desire to present a positive view of the past would necessarily have been subverted by the incorporation of some of the more recent insights and directions in African historiography – the importance of gender and generation, for example. With just three exceptions, all the secondary works cited date from the 1960s, the old-fashioned feel being occasionally reinforced by references such as that to the ‘modern republic of Upper Volta’. The importance of internal slavery is downplayed throughout, while the account of the emergence of the forest states is marred by a flirtation with the ‘Hamitic Hypothesis’, Davidson suggesting that the Yoruba were influenced by migrants from Nile civilizations bringing ‘new political ideas and methods’ (p. 109). More importantly, the book comes to an alarmingly abrupt end, not in 1850 as the title suggests, but with a somewhat misleading account of the eighteenth-century consolidation of the Asante empire. Although a brief concluding chapter points to the 1884 Berlin Conference as the start of the process of imperial dispossession, the period from c. 1800 is entirely omitted. Inexplicably, major issues such as Islamic reformism, the decline of the Atlantic slave trade and the commercial transition to ‘legitimate commerce’ make no appearance. This is especially curious in the light of the author’s recent concern with nineteenth-century attempts at the modernization of African statehood in the face of encroaching European pressures. It also poses certain problems for Davidson’s lifelong project to make the past relevant to the future. If pre-colonial history tells us anything, he has argued, it is that the only solution to the current African impasse is the devolution of power from centralizing bureaucracies back to self-governing communities. But our view of the African past is changing, and it is disappointing that Basil Davidson continues to emphasise the role of the former at the expense of the latter.

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GHANA-FEST


We are told that publishers these days avoid *Festschriften*, but this one is a reminder that the best of such volumes can make just as valuable a contribution to the literature as the best among other collections. Ivor Wilks was presented with thirty-four essays at his retirement reception in 1993. The editors achieved a
general coherence of subject-matter (at the cost of omitting many tantalisingly-titled papers) by focusing the volume on the overlapping themes of the history of Ghana and of Islam in West Africa: the themes that best reflect Wilks’s own work in African history (he is also a major figure in Welsh historiography). Under these heads are arranged revised versions of sixteen of the original papers prefaced by a seventeenth, more general, one by Basil Davidson. In addition the book has a bibliography of Wilks’s writings and a short but fascinating and entertaining biographical essay by Nancy Lawler. The quality of the individual chapters is remarkably well sustained.

Davidson laments the persistence of the widespread sense, outside and even inside Africa, that nothing inspiring for contemporary political culture can be gained from awareness of the pre-colonial past. For some people, not all of them Muslim, just such inspiration might be found in the Suwarian tradition in West African Islam, highlighted in Wilks’s own work, within which many generations of Muslims held true to their own beliefs while finding ways of living within predominantly non-Muslim cultures to the benefit of both communities. The Suwarian theme unites four of the essays on Islamic history. Paulo de Farias shows how the gaani festivals of Borgu combine Islamic and non-Islamic elements in a way which is not paradoxical but is, rather, ‘constitutive’ of Borgu’s traditional political culture. Robert Launay provides a subtle reading of public statements of loyalty to the French made by Dioula clergy in Korhogo (northern Ivory Coast) during the First World War. He interprets them in the context of Suwarian traditions in the area, suggesting that what colonial officials would understand as positive and specific support for themselves would be heard by local Muslims as merely acceptance by the clergy, only, that politics was not their business. David Owusu-Ansah discusses aspects of the oral traditions of a Muslim community that was institutionalized into the service of the Asantehene in the mid-nineteenth century. Donna Maier asks whether Muslims in nineteenth-century Asante were able to establish the right to offer sanctuary. She concludes that the centralizing state, while allowing Muslims certain immunities, prevented any extension of the latter into the kind of physical autonomy required for a sanctuary.

Away from the Suwarrians, R. S. O’Fahey considers the evidence on grants by Muslim rulers to Muslim holy men of exemptions from tax and other liabilities. His survey, which spans Sudanic Africa, identifies a shift in the distribution of power – or at least of ‘initiative’ – in favour of the heads of religious communities at the expense of the state, especially in the nineteenth century. The most analytically ambitious of the ‘Islamic’ contributions is by Ralph Austen, who examines three written and/or oral narratives as a case-study of evolutionary theories of the impact of literacy: theories that, convincingly, he finds serious but also seriously inadequate.

A feature of Wilks’s work has been its extended chronological span. Here, Peter Shinnie gives a brief account of his dig at Asantemanso, some 20 miles from Kumasi, the spot to which many Asante trace their origins. He reports evidence of a settled population of ‘a few thousand’ by c. 1200, which is earlier than suggested by Wilks’s model of the origins of the Akan ‘agrarian order’ (though this non-archaeologist reader was unclear in what sense the data show that the population was so large by this date). On the other hand, as Shinnie indicates, this does not directly affect Wilks’s argument that the origins of the Akan matriclans and states had much to do with the export of gold to the emerging world economy and the import of slaves from elsewhere in West Africa. Larry Yarak revisits the long-running debate about the material basis of Akan states. In a thought-provoking review of history and theory, which deserves a comparative as well as specialist audience, he argues that the main means by which the Asante state acquired revenue was taxation on tribute (including military service), with a secondary role
being played by rent-taking from what was, in effect, a coerced tenantry: slaves and their descendants. While Yarak explicitly relates his analysis to recent debates in global history, Ray Kea also looks outside the African continent. He examines an Akwamu slave revolt in the Danish West Indies in 1733–4, arguing in fascinating detail (some of it necessarily tentative) that it was led by former members of the military-political elite of Akwamu, who had been dispossessed and sold into slavery in 1730. Kea argues that they sought to establish, in effect, a new state on the island of St John, with themselves as the planter class.

Sandra Greene has an elegant comparative study of two prominent ‘stranger’ traders in Anlo in the early and mid-nineteenth century. She plots their different social, political and economic strategies as they manoeuvred within (and outside) the host society and shows that they were able to exercise considerable individual choice in the definition of their social identities. Though addressed to ‘the politics of identity’, Greene’s essay is also a valuable contribution to the economic history of the nineteenth-century ‘commercial transition’ in West Africa.

Gender has been central to recent work on the history of Ghana (as elsewhere) and appropriately in this volume Victoria Tashjian presents a detailed summary of her important dissertation on changing economic relations between spouses in Asante in the era of cocoa-farming and colonial rule. Relatedly, the longest essay, by Jean Allman, examines the history of adultery accusations brought before courts in Asante in the later pre-colonial and colonial periods. She relates this story closely to the broad political, economic and social changes of this long era. This is a rich paper, closely documented and incisively argued, which exemplifies the method of approaching broad issues – here of power, subordination and conflict on gender and class lines – via what, in thematic terms, is a case-study. In relation to the general issue of the ‘invention’ of customary law in colonial Africa, Allman shows, at least for this aspect of law, ‘What would become Asante customary law was the product not just of a contested colonial present but of a contested pre-colonial past’. This observation also has implications for Davidson’s lament.

Esther and Jack Goody reflect on the distinction between being clothed and wearing textiles, the association of the latter with membership of a politically-centralized society (such as Gonja) and the increasing pressures on the acephalous societies in northern Ghana (notably the LoDagaa) to follow suit. Specifically on the last half-century, Enid Schildkrout and Robert Kramer present aspects of political culture among different sections of the Muslim population of Kumasi. Schildkrout summarizes and discusses a literary text, written for her in Arabic by an informant in 1967, which gives insight into Kumasi Muslims’ perspectives on decolonization. Kramer describes conflicts within the ‘stranger’ communities of the Kumasi Zongo in 1990.

The book has much of interest on primary sources. For example, Polly Hill returns to the migrant cocoa-farmers of southern Ghana, this time to give us some examples of the court records that are available as potential sources on the subject she famously explored through oral testimonies. She also pays tribute to a key research assistant. Enid Schildkrout’s chapter is remarkable in that the text she presents reverses the telescope: it includes a discussion of the researcher (Schildkrout herself, when a graduate student) by one of her informants. This team of authors and editors – ranging from some of Wilks’s oldest colleagues to some of his more recent students – have done a splendid job of honouring him by advancing his (West African) field.

In this interesting history of the Owan people of the mid-western region of Nigeria from the early fourteenth to the early twentieth centuries, Ogbomo sets out to center women and gender relations. He acknowledges that the current patriarchal and patrilineal structure of the ten communities today known as Owan complicates his task of centering women and analyzing the evolution of gender relations, particularly because he relies primarily on oral interviews with men. Moreover, most of his research assistants were male. One can't help wondering whether if more of his research assistants were female he would have gotten better access to female ‘informants’. Still, he presents an interesting hypothesis about the development of patriarchy among people whom he posits were originally matriarchal – which he defines as being matrilineal, having a pantheon of goddesses and practicing matrilocality. Because the people who constitute the Owan communities were ‘acephalous’ (at least until British colonizers began appointing chiefs among them), Ogbomo cannot present a line of female rulers, which caused this reviewer to question the use of the term ‘matriarchy’. Though Ogbomo justifies use of the term by referring to other scholars who claim communities where there are equal relations between the sexes are matriarchal, I found this a stretch of the terminology. Far more plausible was Ogbomo’s use of the term matriarchy to refer to the early period (1320–1500 A.D.) when he speculates that women controlled access to land, thus positing a material base for the exercise of women’s power.

By analyzing traditions of goddesses (after one of whom the Owan named themselves), totems, shrines, re-enactment ceremonies, festivals and some elements of oral histories (and a small number of secondary sources such as intelligence reports by colonial administrators, works by local historians of Owan and undergraduate essays from students at the University of Ibadan and Bendel [now Edo] State University) Ogbomo argues that male domination evolved in Owan society. He locates its beginnings in an influx of settlers (c. 1500), from Benin primarily but also from the Yoruba region to the west of the Owan. It is these immigrants whom he credits with causing ‘a major revolution in gender relations’ (p. 166) as they introduced patriarchy to the Owan. However, Ogbomo suggests that this revolution occurred over time as the economic basis for women’s power, though it shifted from control of land to that of important crops (such as cotton), continued to allow women to exert strong political and social influence, at least until the turn of the eighteenth century when a rise in wars and the collapse of cotton exports provided the material conditions for the triumph of patriarchy. Ogbomo attributes the final institutionalization of patriarchy, however, to British colonialism, especially but not solely because it created a male chieftaincy tradition and a hierarchical structure of governance. Thus Ogbomo posits the Owan people as originally matriarchal and as having been converted to patriarchy by being the recipient of patriarchal traditions of Benin, the Yoruba and finally the British. One major question he does not quite answer for us is why patriarchal traditions would overpower matriarchal ones.

The importance of Ogbomo’s study lies in several areas. It is one of the relatively few historical studies of pre-colonial Africa (such as that of Sandra Greene on the Anlo-Ewe of Ghana) that attempts to centralize gender in its investigation. Ogbomo’s creative use of oral and other non-written sources and his interesting appendix on research methods and field experience will be useful for other pre-colonial investigations. In addition, this work adds its voice to a growing number
of studies that argue that though female and male spheres existed in pre-colonial African societies, for many there was no dichotomous gendering of the private sphere as female and the public sphere as male. Rather, they argue that women and men – based on more than sex or gender – crossed boundaries when it came to the exercise of power. For instance, Ifi Amadiume (1987) argues that though Igbo women were subordinate as wives in the lineages into which they married, they were ‘husbands’ to the wives of the men in their natal lineages and thus exercised powers of ownership and decision making there. Oyeronke Oyewumi (1997) argues that among the Yoruba age mattered as much as sex in designating gender roles.

On the issue of whether the location of spheres of female power indicates complementarity of gender roles and therefore an absence of patriarchy, the evidence seems hardly conclusive. What does seem apparent is that there have been different historical trajectories in the evolution of gender roles and gender relations and that they have been far more nuanced in the delineation of female and male gender than many male controlled historical sources (oral or written, African or Western) would lead us to believe. In this regard Ogbomo succeeds in adding another African example that challenges any universalizing approach to the study of gender, which suggests a unilinear evolution and design of patriarchy, though he does not challenge its ubiquitous existence, at least by 1500.

This study is interesting because it sets in place another piece in the puzzle of pre-colonial Africa and in the global history of women.

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CHERYL JOHNSON-ODIM

ART AND POWER


The art of Africa has always appealed to publishers as an opportunity to produce lavish monographs with high quality illustrations that provide an introductory overview of its arts and cultures for a general readership. *African Royal Court Art* is a new addition to this endless publishing conveyor belt but its author has come up with an interesting thematic perspective by proposing to use portraiture as a category to explore the royal court arts in the kingdoms of Africa. Her intentions are to examine how these arts produce imagery that embeds political and social hierarchies of power through the realization of that art centred on the person and office of the principal ruler. This conceptual approach allows her to develop portraiture as an iconographic category, given that these forms produced in Africa are constituted in ways very different to western traditions of portraiture from the European renaissance onwards – although she seeks to draw out contrasts and similarities with the royal arts of Europe and elsewhere. Her focus has the potential to provide a productive analysis through a thematic comparison of the royal court arts in their diverse contexts, especially in her use of the kingdom of Benin as a narrative motif with which to counterpoint her arguments throughout the book.

In the first two of five chapters, the author explores the singular identity of kingship that differentiates a ruler from his subjects and relates this theme to the conceptual use of portraiture as an iconographic category for analyzing the royal court arts. She argues that such arts focus on the person and office of the ruler and that it is the emphasis on the personal that distinguishes this iconography from other traditions of art in Africa. She provides a few ethnographic examples of kingdoms drawn predominantly from West and Central Africa to support her
thesis and to suggest a range of forms of portraiture, noting that she cannot
describe every kingdom (p. 2). Chapter three seeks to explore how the imagery
produced at these royal courts encapsulates the narrative events of the ruling
dynasties through which a defining history of the kingdom is constituted.
However, this analysis is heavily reliant on anecdotal and repetitive description
derived almost entirely from the kingdoms of Benin (in southern Nigeria) and
Dahomey, the latter allowing the author to make a link between visual and verbal
representations of that kingdom. In the following chapter she draws a distinction
between this iconography of historical narrative and the insignia of sovereignty in
order to underline how the power and authority of kingship is imprinted on to the
visual domain of artefacts and consequently inscribed as part of a natural order.
Almost as an afterthought, the final chapter entitled ‘Elements of archaeology and
history’ concludes with a rather cursory historical description of various kingdoms
touching belatedly upon the major impact of Islam on sub-Saharan Africa).
Confusingly, most of these kingdoms have not featured in the book until this point,
although this chapter does at least give a semblance of the historical timelines
involved for different kingdoms.

From the outset this book presents an impressionistic, sometimes contradictory,
narrative of African arts couched in a repetitive French structuralist idiom that
takes for granted an absence of historical trajectories in these societies. This is
seemingly justified by Michèle Coquet’s emphasis on ‘an iconological reflection
on certain conceptions of the image and the object’ (p. xi). Despite the seemingly
innovatory focus on the theme of portraiture, the book reproduces the usual
clichéd format for this genre by presenting the well-known arenas of artistic
production of West and Central Africa. Moreover a curious, if not insidious,
personal commentary on Africa per se is interjected throughout, such as: ‘there are
no great architectural works as we know them’ (p. 2), and ‘I shall refer to artworks
in the round as there has been no art of the pictorial portrait in Africa (at least until
recently)’ (p. 33), which demonstrate disturbing lacunae of knowledge about
African arts and societies, further underlined by the glaring omission of any
reference to the artistic traditions of Ethiopia (with its rock-hewn churches and
longstanding traditions of two-dimensional pictorial representation), as well as of
East Africa and elsewhere. Contrary to its avowed intentions to extend conceptually
the category of the portrait, there are difficulties throughout in the author’s
attempts to apply poorly defined art historical generalizations that are as
reductionist of western traditions of art (the development of various forms of
perspective developed in the course of the European renaissance are simply
described as ‘trompe l’oeil’, p. 32) as their ill-conceived application to traditions
within Africa. As serious a flaw is the complete lack of an account of stylistic
development and seriation of artefacts in the production of these royal court arts
which, as a consequence, seem to reside in some timeless arcadia, even where they
have developed over a timespan of five hundred years, as in the case of the kingdom
of Benin. Moreover, it is depressing to read that the kingdom of Benin is
erroneously equated with the ‘coast of Benin’ and defined as a slave raiding
entrepot (p. 155), which historically it was not.

This is a book that is confusing for a general readership and frustrating for the
specialist because it ignores the endeavours of at least the last thirty years of
historical scholarship on Africa. Its difficulties are compounded by its translation,
characterized in the use of such expressions as ‘adequation’ (p. 65), ‘perspectivist
rendering’ (p. 76) or ‘historiated’ (p. 83) – which surely required the firm hand of
a publishing editor.

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CHARLES GORE
In the first half of the nineteenth century the ancient coastal kingdom of Ngoyo, situated just north of the Congo River, was the last major source of slaves for the Atlantic trade. Now divided between Cabinda and the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ngoyo has been relatively neglected by ethnographers; Zdenka Volavka’s study of the Lusunzi shrine could be expected to fill an important gap. The author, now deceased, was born in Czechoslovakia, emigrated in 1968 and taught art history at York University in Canada. Her book was prepared for posthumous publication by two of her former students; it lacks two additional chapters that were left unfinished. The completed parts are based on extensive fieldwork, not only in Ngoyo but in adjacent KiKongo speaking areas and also on extensive research in European libraries and museums. The result looks like an impressive scholarly work, but in fact much of it is romantic fiction. The accumulation of details and connections seems impressive, but the details are often wrong and the connections tenuous; the house is built of cards.

The book’s most reliable aspects deal with material culture. Its starting point and centrepiece is a unique copper construction removed from the shrine in 1933 by the missionary Tastevin and deposited by him in the Musée de l’Homme; he said it was a fishing basket for Lusunzi, a ‘nature’ spirit of the kind called simbi, nkita or nkisi nsi. The shrine was one of four such that the candidate kings of Ngoyo were required to visit in the course of their investiture. Volavka decides that the copper construction is a symbolic cap or crown, although it is superhuman in scale and weighs 11 kg. She describes the form, material and making of this and associated objects in great detail, including highly technical chemical and spectrographic analyses; she adds much information about local mining and metalworking in copper and iron, with reference also to other parts of the continent. All this is excellent. On the other hand, her ideas concerning the ‘crown’s’ ritual function and the place of the shrine and its rituals in the political history of Ngoyo are often far-fetched – though I am sorry to have to say so when the author is no longer able to reply. For a different assessment, readers are referred to Jan Vansina’s laudatory foreword.

Volavka’s interpretations are grounded in the culture-historical school of anthropology that prevailed in Eastern Europe until the end of the Cold War. Much of her argument depends on Carl Meinhof’s assumption that the meanings of Bantu words can be discovered by treating them as strings of primitive monosyllabic words; she completely ignores modern linguistics, including Malcolm Guthrie’s work, despite its obvious relevance. So, having decided that the ‘basket’ resembles a type of cap called ngunda, she asserts that the name is derived from ngu, meaning ‘mother’. Being of copper, it is red, and red ‘is associated with female forces’. More of this sort of argument, both spuriously precise and conveniently vague, conducted with no reference to the literature on colour symbolism in Central Africa or any other modern ethnography, leads to the conclusion that the candidate’s exposure to the cap/crown amounted to a confrontation with ‘the generative mother’ and his symbolic marriage into his own kin-group.

From a naive reading of local tradition, backed by uncritical reliance on colonial fantasies about African ‘secret societies’ but with no reference to the prolonged discussions among historians concerning the difficulties oral tradition presents, the author deduces a sequence of political developments in Ngoyo, beginning with an
elite brotherhood of blacksmith priests whose influence she believes she can detect as far away as the Great Lakes. The supposed stages of this development are deduced from very slight evidence and cannot be correlated with any other history of the region. Saying ‘there can be little doubt’ that investiture ensued from older and more powerful principles than kingship, Volavka asserts that the demands of the rituals themselves put an end to investiture in Ngoyo, rather than the political and economic developments that Phyllis Martin says rendered kingship irrelevant. These matters would perhaps have been clarified in the unpublished chapters.

The role of ‘nature’ spirits in the investiture of chiefs is well documented for a wide area of West Central Africa, as is the relationship of metalworking to the creative forces these spirits represent. Lusunzi played such a role in Ngoyo and elsewhere in the KiKongo-speaking zone; the extraordinary ‘cap/crown’ was surely the most sacred element of the related insignia. Many details uncovered by Volavka’s research are of interest to specialists, though her interpretations are often unreliable. The ‘crown’ itself, however, remains an enigma; perhaps it was, after all, Lusunzi’s fishing basket.

Haverford College

THE FOUNDING IDEAS OF ZULU IDENTITY

Terrific Majesty: The Powers of Shaka Zulu and the Limits of Historical Invention.

‘A Zulu renaissance’, according to a recent South African press report, ‘is flowing through the province of KwaZulu-Natal’. This is an area of South Africa where politicized Zulu ethnicity was associated with political violence and the loss of over 10,000 lives in the 1980s and early 1990s. Political conflict provided part of the background for the production of Carolyn Hamilton’s Terrific Majesty: The Powers of Shaka Zulu and the Limits of Historical Invention – a study of the history of representations of Shaka that offers illuminating insights into the labile workings of politics and memory in KwaZulu-Natal.

In its broadest terms Terrific Majesty seeks to explore the history of the image of the Zulu king Shaka (‘a founding idea of Zulu identity’) and, at the same time, indicate the ways in which the production of this image was constrained by historical context. Through a number of case studies, Hamilton persuasively argues that the roots of many of the images of Shaka lie in indigenous discourses and that these discourses (notably oral traditions) served to constrain colonial understandings of Shaka and representations of Zulu society. Through a complex dialogue between colonial and indigenous narratives, the ‘Shakan system of government’ came to shape colonialism and colonial administration in a variety of ways. And in a further elaboration of this process during the era of apartheid, the figure of Shaka and the Shakan regime became embedded as metaphors in South African political discourse. Hamilton’s study shares many of the concerns that have animated scholars of Natal and Zulu history in recent years. But in other respects her work stands in ambiguous relation to the historiography. It is arguably this liminality that supports the rich insights and establishes the particular importance of Terrific Majesty.

The idea that the history of the study of the representation of the historical process in the historian’s account is equally, if not more, important than the study of historical process itself has been an influential one among scholars of Zulu history and identity. Most, however, have resisted the notion that the past is
reducible to the study of representations of it. Rather, it is to a more general concern with the history of historical consciousness, particularly among dominant social groups in the pre-colonial or early colonial period, that studies have turned. This concern with the production of history received vital impetus from the ‘Mfecane’ debate. The idea that a series of wars and migrations was set in motion by the expansion of the Zulu state under Shaka was rejected by some historians as a white myth that justified settler land-grabbing and reinforced stereotypes of the Zulu as a warrior nation. The significance of the subsequent controversy for scholars of Zulu history was clear: it touched directly on questions of representation and genealogy; on the challenging issues of Zulu origins, foundational myths and ethnic stereotypes. In short, it encouraged a re-evaluation of the historiography of the ‘Zulu’ in general and of Shaka in particular. Recent years have thus seen the appearance of numerous studies that analyze the creation of colonial images, stereotypes and histories of the Zulu and that owe something of a debt to the representational and literary concerns of post-structuralism. Attention has also turned to the exploration of the production of the image of Shaka. Daphna Golan’s *Inventing Shaka* is one obvious example of this preoccupation and it is against Golan’s study that *Terrific Majesty* will probably be read.

*Terrific Majesty* was also forged in the heat of this historiographical moment. But Hamilton’s commitment to an historicized understanding of the image of Shaka arguably places her work several steps removed from the more obvious literary concerns of other scholars in the field. Indeed, *Terrific Majesty* stands in self-consciously ambiguous relation to those studies, which are more concerned with the discourses of power and knowledge through which Zulu identity and the Zulu past have been constructed than with ‘what actually happened in the past’.

The implications of Hamilton’s arguments are significant. It is precisely her insistence that the study of the history of representation should be linked to historical context and process that compels her to reject unbounded and crude notions of cultural invention. Moreover, her emphasis on the particular circumstances under which texts were produced, together with her recognition of the importance of Zulu understandings of the past for ‘white’ constructions of Shaka, leads her to reject ‘orientalist’ notions of a monolithic western discourse on the Zulu. This sensitivity to internally differentiated indigenous systems of knowledge and the historical conditions under which particular texts were produced has important implications for the reading of sources previously condemned as irredeemably tainted or embodying racist western stereotypes.

It takes nothing from the elegance and ambitions of this study to suggest some areas that might have attracted a little more attention. First, Hamilton claims that she ‘does not seek to construct a continuous homogenising narrative that “explains” the development of the image and metaphor of Shaka’ (p. 35) – a reasonable caveat given the insights of her book. But it could be argued that the elaboration of the image of Shaka is only fully intelligible within an understanding of changing historical process and perhaps, therefore, questions of periodization and chronology are of legitimate concern. One might ask, then, whether it is possible for the narrative to move from the 1910s to the 1980s (and largely pass over the adaptation of the image of Shaka in the intervening period) without undermining the overall integrity of the project? Perhaps this reflects an underlying tension in the study: that the preoccupation with the history of the representation of the historical process in the historian’s account of it sometimes threatens to work to the exclusion of the study of the ruptures and continuities in the historical process itself. Second, it could be argued that in a work that is fundamentally concerned with the recovery of what might be termed hidden texts and the complex historical dialogue between ‘colonial’ and ‘indigenous’ systems of knowledge, one might have expected more discussion on the role of Zulu-speakers
themselves in the complex layering of notions of Zulu identity and history over time.

That said, Terrific Majesty represents a vital contribution to a new understanding of the founding ideas of Zulu identity. We are familiar, of course, with the role of missionaries, colonial officials and anthropologists, among others, in the construction (and, in some cases, fabrication) of ethnic communities throughout Africa. Until now the literature in the case of the Zulu has tended to place an inordinate emphasis on the ‘white’/colonial/European construction of Zulu ethnic consciousness. While perhaps no other politicized ethnicity in Africa owes as much – over a long period of time – to white/colonial/European cultural fabrications as does that of the ‘Zulu’, this identity has been created and recreated during the course of a long and little understood historical dialogue with, amongst and against the Zulu themselves. Hamilton’s recognition of the complexity of the relationship between indigenous and colonial narratives suggests that we are moving to a new understanding of the interlocutors in this dialogue and therefore of the nature of the interchange itself.

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‘THE GREAT KALAHARI DEBATE’


Siegfried Passarge, foundation Professor of Geography at the University of Hamburg, was a prolific scholar who by the time of his death in 1958 is reputed to have had over 500 publications to his name. Some of the earliest are based on his experiences in the Kalahari. These observations – one could hardly term them, as Wilmsen does, ‘participant observation’ – cover a two and half year period from June 1896 to November 1898 when he was employed as an assistant geological surveyor with the British West Charterland’s economic assessment of Ngamiland in an expedition led by the later proconsul, Lord Lugard.

Published in German, most of this work is inaccessible to Anglo-American scholars despite its importance in defining the field of Khoisan ethnography largely through the classic studies of Isaac Schapera. Wilmsen has sought, with this volume, to remedy the situation.

The book consists of a portrait of the man, a single rather inadequate map of Passarge’s travel routes, a longish introduction and then a number of Passarge’s papers and extracts of books translated by a variety of people including Wilmsen himself. Wilmsen’s use of the Lugard papers in Rhodes House in assessing Passarge’s Kalahari contribution are useful. Undoubtedly, though, the centrepiece of this collection is ‘The Bushmen of the Kalahari’, first published in journal format in 1905 and then two years later as a monograph. Neither source is readily available for study. Given the contentious reception some of Wilmsen’s German translations have received in his award-winning Land Filled With Flies, it would be nice to have some guarantee as to the reliability of the present effort, but unfortunately we are not told what qualifications these translators have. Translation is not a neutral act: nuances can twist a work into a new direction and these biases rapidly show. For example, Vermischung (interbreeding) is translated as ‘intermarriage’, ‘passive’ is glossed as ‘submissive’, and so on. Some bibliographic references are cavalierly entered without initials, as are the 26 illustrations and map reproduced in this version, presumably in an effort to keep down cost. Some would
argue that, given the way historical sources are re-evaluated, such material is essential and must be properly presented.

In view of the varied funding Wilmsen received for this project, one can hardly blame him for proclaiming its importance: he casts it as the ‘First Great Kalahari Debate’ and infers parallels between Passarge’s arguments and his treatment at the hands of the defenders of the scholastic status quo and the treatment he believes he has himself received.

In many ways this is a frustrating work. Wilmsen is meticulous and brilliant in parts, and outrageously sloppy in others. If Passarge were so important, it would be nice to know more about him. He did not engage in research with a blank mind. Who and what were the formative influences on his work? Clearly Ratzel, an arch-apologist for colonialism, was important yet we are not told what impact he had. A wider sense of the context in which Passarge operated would also have been useful. How did the need to secure an academic job shape the way Passarge wrote? To this reviewer at least, Passarge’s notion of ‘degeneration’, rather than being innovative, simply places him in the company of Austrian diffusionists like Poech.

In short, a flawed masterpiece.

University of Vermont

ROBERT J. GORDON

RICH PICKINGS AND MISSED OPPORTUNITIES


Generations of South Africans retain vivid childhood memories of visiting the South African Museum in Cape Town where they were transfixed by the numinous Bushman dioramas depicting their country’s ‘prehistoric’ inhabitants. The life-like plaster figures, which inhabit timeless scenes in the South African veld, were made in 1912 as part of a casting project to record the ‘fast disappearing bush races’. Since then, they have undergone several reincarnations in response to changing museum display policy but they remain one of the most popular attractions to this day. It is surprising therefore that Miscast contains so few references to the Bushman casts from which the book undoubtedly derives its title, for they embrace a quintessential metaphor for the evolution of Bushman representations in the ethnically and racially charged history of southern Africa. This book, and the exhibition from which it derives, serve as cultural milestones in the new South Africa, a cathartic expression of a new orthodoxy in confronting the past, an exercise in cultural ‘truth and reconciliation’. What better currency than this well worn coin of otherness – the Bushmen – to evince and expose the intractable legacy of South Africa’s colonial allure, violence, tragedy and attempted redemption.

Miscast is an heroic attempt to disentangle the complexity of issues surrounding the disparate peoples who have come to be known as Bushmen. Pippa Skotnes, as curator and editor, has assembled one of the most comprehensive collections of essays, images, artefacts and historical documents to illuminate the history and historiography of this southern African people. Thirty essays and hundreds of extraordinary illustrations – including archival and contemporary photographs, paintings, drawings, archival texts and artefacts – focus on subjects ranging from genocide to the use of rock art imagery in contemporary South African advertising. Her ‘parallel text’ is partially successful in counterbalancing the literary weight and in unifying the diverse subject matter of the book, through a loosely structured
series of images and narratives intended to give the viewer a more sensuous, more intuitive understanding of the experience of being ‘Bushman’ – what Pippa Skotnes might call a ‘poetics of embodiment’. Her intention is to persuade us of the multiplicity of history, that there is not ‘just one narrative…nor even one past, but that our knowledge of other realities is most severely limited when we limit the formal frameworks that we choose to employ in understanding them’ (p. 23).

Much of the book is a tribute to and exposition of the work of Lucy Lloyd, the South African ethnographer who, in collaboration with Wilhelm Bleek, created a 13,000-page archive of /Xam and !Kung cultural memories and traditions during the late nineteenth century. But the collection of essays is also more wide-ranging than that, exploring the richness of various Khoisan traditions as expressed in the art, language and ritual practices of the past and (to a lesser extent) the present. The history of European representations of Bushmen, the European fascination with Khoisan anatomy and the underlying ideologies that fostered and reinforced this obsession with the ‘Bushman body’ (under the guise of scientific anthropometry, documentation of genitalia, skulls, bones and live exhibitions) are explored in a lively post-modern idiom.

It is impossible to do justice to the varied and scholarly contributions to Miscast in such a short review. The rich quality of the visual format and high reproduction standards are matched by many of the well crafted and concise academic essays. The publication of Bushman images by photographers such as Duggan-Cronin and Paul Weinberg are the icing on a rich cake of previously unpublished archival photographs, illustrations, hand-written texts and drawings. Most of the contributors are either historians, archaeologists, linguists or anthropologists with specialist knowledge of Khoisan subjects, many of whom have published widely. Nigel Penn, Paul Landau, Anthony Traill, Ed Wilmsen, Alan Barnard, Rob Gordon, Mathias Guenther, John Parkington, David Lewis-Williams and Carmel Schrire are a few of the better known writers from this pantheon of Khoisan specialists.

Because of its ambitious remit, Miscast inevitably falls somewhere between an exhibition catalogue, a glossy ‘coffee-table’ book and a scholarly volume of specialist writing. Such compromises are, on the whole, creative and innovative. However, a more fundamental compromise casts grave doubt upon the basic premise of the book – the fallacy of its subtitle – Negotiating the Presence of the Bushmen. More accurately, it is the absence of Bushmen that the book celebrates. One wonders why, given the enormous effort involved, no attempt was made to include contemporary Khoisan voices in this ‘negotiation’: it seems incredible that the closest the editor came to consulting with contemporary ‘Bushmen’ was through the agency of a human rights lawyer. The vast majority of the contributors are male academics of European extraction, although to be fair, many of these individuals have actively campaigned for Bushman rights while declaring the category ‘Bushman’ as a false one in the first place. Few essays in the book touch on the vital and ongoing cultural interactions between Khoisan and black South Africans. The Eurocentric bias here is unmistakable.

So it should have come as no surprise that controversy erupted over the staging of the Miscast exhibition at the South African National Gallery in 1996, when Khoisan voices were finally heard, protesting that once again their culture and history were being expropriated and stereotyped, reinforcing their status as an underclass. The exhibition’s attempt to interrogate the ‘miscast’ conceptions underlying the South African Museum dioramas – the popular myth that transfixes this disparate people in a timeless past – in order to expose the historical relationships that led to their dispossession and decimation, was shown to be fatally flawed. Think of the difficulty of representing similar histories of oppression: the Jews, Native Americans, Tutsis, Kosovars…it is hard to understand
why Miscast was staged without ceding at least some measure of control over the interpretation and presentation of this history to the people who continue to find themselves on the receiving end of it. The very language and terminology used to constitute and negotiate the presence of the Bushmen is so imbued with the misconceptions and injustices of colonialism that it is all but defunct. Perhaps this will be the abiding legacy of Miscast: that any serious attempt to negotiate South Africa’s past will be endlessly miscast as long as the diversity of contemporary South African voices remains unheard.

In spite of this missed opportunity, Miscast provides rich pickings for all scholarly foragers with an interest in South African history and Khoisan studies.

University of Edinburgh

PHOTOGRAPHIC ENCOUNTERS


The aim of Picturing Bushmen is to explore the cultural formations of the photographs and cinefilm from the Denver African Expedition, which spent almost three months in South West Africa in 1925, ‘discovering’ and recording Bushmen (mainly Hei//omn). The expedition was sponsored by a group of Denver businessmen, persuaded that such an expedition would bring honour and renown to Denver itself. It was an amalgam of exploration, big game hunting and popular anthropology. Despite the expedition’s scientific claims and its modern technological preoccupations, it depended upon and reinforced tropes of the primitive exotic, the fantasy of the lost race, the missing link or the cradle of humanity, tropes that had informed popular ideas about the Bushmen in particular, and Africa more generally and that infused the literature and spectacles of popular anthropology and travel from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. This rhetoric was replayed throughout the extensive reporting of the expedition in the United States. Thus the volume not only looks at the aims, methods and results of the expedition but more importantly how, in the public and popular domain, its claims and rhetoric could be credible.

While, as the title suggests, the visualization of the Bushmen through the expedition’s activities constitutes the main focus, Gordon explores a wealth of fascinating, and frankly disturbing, documentation; diaries, magazine articles, popular lectures, travel and adventure books and newspaper articles from which it is possible to construct the discursive formations that gave shape and legitimacy to the expedition. However, while this evidence is both absorbing and convincing, his analysis of the visualization through photography and film is less effective. While the sources are, as one would expect from Gordon, dense and thorough for the history and ethnography of the Bushmen, his reliance on, for the most part, generalising and generalised writing on photography severely restricts the analysis of the images themselves. One is seldom brought to grips with precisely how the rhetorics of the expedition were constituted visually. The problem with relying on theorists such as Sontag (whatever her merits) and even Barthes (indeed my own personal favourite), and little beyond, is that such writing seldom differentiates between the various strands of photographic practice and consumption. At one level photography is a continuum of interlocking practices and intentions united by one technology. It operates within a broad photographic and visual culture encompassing everything from arts practice to amateur snapshots.
Conversely, at another level, photography is a series of different practices, different strands, all of which have different intentions, different cultural expectations and social usages. Here the functional, the aesthetic, the documenting and the political strands, which cohere with different intensities through the expedition photographs, are never fully explored within a firm analytical grip on these intersecting axes. Neither the bibliography nor the analysis itself reveals a familiarity with some of the complex and deeply historized analyses of photographic encounters that are emerging within research on the ethnography of photography. Consequently, the author is forced into the position of making very generalized and over-homogenizing statements about, for instance, the power relations inherent in colonial photography or the nature of anthropological photography. Further, photography itself appears as historically undynamic, some forty years of practice (not to mention technological change) are neatly homogenized. Even when juxtaposed with revealing quotations from the diaries of expedition photographer, Paul Hoefler, or the writings of expedition leader, C. Ernest Cadle, such a wide and unspecified sweep can do little to forward the analysis of the actual, specific photographic discourse that emerged from the expedition and the nuances and contradictions that are clearly contained within the record. Conversely, invaluable are the appendices collating the whole known corpus of the expedition’s photographs, listing the different collections in which they appear and the different captions attached to them, and the reel-by-reel listing of the films with their sub-titles. These will be immensely useful, not only for scholars following in Gordon’s footsteps but for those wishing for sense of the expedition’s output as a cultural artifact. Would that more studies included such listings.

As the ethnography of an expedition, this volume is rich and compelling. It encompasses popular culture, American cultural identity and technological progress, colonial cross-cultural relations (including those with white settler society), anthropological and archaeological debates, the development of Namibian national identity and the contemporary relevance of the expedition’s output. This is interwoven with racial attitudes and fantasies, negative and positive, scientific and popular, surrounding the representation of Bushmen. As an analysis of the visual legacy it is, however, more limited.

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ELIZABETH EDWARDS

HISTORICIZING LABOUR MIGRATION


In Willing Migrants, the late François Manchuelle, who lost his life in the tragic crash of TWA flight 800 in the summer of 1996, has left a valuable and impressive legacy to the social and economic history of Africa. The fruit of a decade’s thought and research on Soninke labour diasporas and comparative labour migration, this book’s careful and comprehensive research, constant questioning of conventional wisdom and conscientious confrontation of theory with empirical data embodies the very best of the historical enterprise. We owe a great debt of gratitude to James A. Webb, Jr. who shepherded François’ nearly completed manuscript through to publication. And yet, while we are grateful for the book, its superb qualities inevitably lead us not only to mourn the senseless loss of François, colleague and
friend, but also to regret other books that, had he lived, he would undoubtedly have written.

Manchuelle’s book makes several outstanding contributions to African history in general, and to the historical study of labour migration in particular. First, its introduction, seven chapters and conclusion underscore the long history of Soninke mobility. Beginning with the diasporas of traders following the collapse of ancient Ghana and dry-season raiding for slaves in the Niger valley in the medieval and early modern eras, Soninke migrants participated in the salt trade and then in the commerce in gum arabic in the Senegal River valley. Later Soninke seasonal migrants participated in commercial cereal and peanut cultivation, and then sought employment as temporary, and then permanent, workers in the emerging urban centres of colonial Senegal. Soninke migrants also worked as labourers and sailors – first on boats on the Senegal River and then on ships that plied the Atlantic and the Mediterranean where a Soninke community existed in Marseilles as early as the 1920s. Manchuelle concludes with a survey of Soninke migration to France between the end of the Second World War and the coming of independence to francophone Africa in 1960.

He also includes fascinating vignettes on Soninke labour migration to French Equatorial Africa and urban centres in French West Africa and Nigeria that complete a picture that convincingly demonstrates that colonial and ‘modern’ migration had earlier roots and certainly were not the ‘unnatural’ distortions of ‘traditional’ African society lamented by colonial humanists like Maurice Delafosse or by the social anthropologists of the Rhodes–Livingstone Institute in British Central Africa. In so doing, Manchuelle shows how absolutely essential it is to add historical dimensions to our understanding of migration in Africa.

The second contribution of *Willing Migrants* is to provide a rich, nuanced analysis of the social, political and economic contexts of the genesis and evolution of Soninke migration that demolishes the prevailing ‘wisdom’ that labour migration in Africa is uniformly a product of poverty and colonial coercion. Manchuelle shows that some of the earliest migrants to participate in the emerging French colonial economy in the Senegal River valley were freemen of the upper castes of Soninke society who found – as early as the nineteenth century – that they could increase their wealth and autonomy by becoming migrants and using a portion of their wages both to purchase slaves to replace themselves at home and to build a clientele. Following the abolition of slavery, they adapted their strategy by hiring inexpensive free labour from lands further east. Indeed Manchuelle suggests that migration was a more attractive alternative than becoming a trader because a migrant’s wages were his own, whereas a trader depended on capital provided by his family for the initial purchase of goods – a debt that reduced his autonomy. Finally, the volume demonstrates quite convincingly that, contrary to popular stereotypes, the earliest labour migrants came from the upper, wealthier classes of Soninke society, who were joined only later by their less fortunate fellows.

Manchuelle’s third major achievement is to document the degree to which migration networks are not simply passive conduits of information about working conditions and life at destinations, but, in the case of the Soninke and others, were causal factors in their own right. And lastly, but crucially, *Willing Migrants* is a very impressive research achievement. Manchuelle combines information from interviews with former migrants of recent decades, documentation from the colonial archives, and research on comparable migration networks to produce an analysis that is both encyclopedic and elegant.

In closing, I will take issue with the definitive character of Manchuelle’s conclusions regarding the impact of French colonial labour policies on Soninke society. Brief analyses of the impact of each form of colonial labour requisition –
military recruitment, travail forcé and others – are scattered through the book in more or less chronological order. Following each presentation, Manchuelle concludes that the impact of the loss of labour was minimal. Indeed, this may well be the case, but as presented the data do not support such an unambiguous judgement. The book includes neither a critical, systematic presentation of the data on the evolution of the size and composition of the Soninke population, nor a comprehensive review of the combined impact of the various forms of colonial labour extraction. However, this reservation in no way whatsoever calls into question the major conclusions of a study that should truly be an inspiration to historians and other social scientists struggling to add a deeper time dimension, and more comprehensive social, political, cultural and economic perspectives, to our analyses and understandings of migration in Africa.¹

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DENNIS D. CORDELL

HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT IN TANZANIA


The period of about thirty years of German colonial rule in East Africa still seems to define a special relationship between Tanzania and Germany. In German public imagination, Tanzania stands (along with Namibia) for romantic Africa in its entirety; Tanzania has for many years been the focus of German development policies; and a sizeable number of scholars within the African Studies community in Germany focuses on Tanzania.

This volume emerged from a series of public lectures and panel discussions on Tanzania, held at the Berlin Haus der Kulturen der Welt (House of the Cultures of the World) in mid-1994. It comprises five essays on Tanzanian history and politics, transcripts of contributions to a panel discussion about issues of development policy and developmental colonialism. Part of the latter is in English, as are two of the papers; the remainder of the book is in German. Most contributions provide strong coverage of German influence, looking at the colonial period and to more contemporary issues of development policy, but they are not limited to this aspect.

Three essays in this volume study aspects of economic, political and ecological history in a long-term perspective, all linked to issues of development. Abdul Sheriff provides a short overview of Tanzania’s (mainly economic) history from the pre-colonial to the colonial period under the perspective of the territory’s integration into world economies, first that of the Indian Ocean and later of the capitalist world economy. Jan-Georg Deutsch explores the history of local administrative systems, from the establishment of colonial rule up to the multi-party system emerging in the 1990s. Writing under the impact of the Rwandan genocide, he emphasizes the limited importance of the ethnic factor in Tanzanian politics (compared to its role in some of Tanzania’s neighbouring countries) to the fact that tribal forms of local government were short-lived under British colonial

¹ Two other recent monographs make similar efforts at offering more complex historical and social analyses of the forms and meaning of migration in West Africa. See, on the Dogon of Mali, Véronique Petit, Les migrations dogon (Paris, 1998); and, on Burkinabé migration, Dennis D. Cordell, Joel W. Gregory, and Victor Piché, Hoe and Wage: A Social History of a Circular Migration System in West Africa (Boulder, CO, 1996).
rule and actively discouraged by post-colonial governments. Achim von Oppen studies the policies of conservation and protection of natural resources that formed, from the beginning, an integral part in the establishment of the central state. He questions the assumption that crisis discourses have always duly reflected actual ecological problems and looks at the inter-relationship between conservation and development policies and political and economic interests on the local level. Some of these issues are taken up again by development policy practitioners in the transcribed contributions to the panel discussion.

Two further essays in the volume focus on the intellectual history of the colonial relationship. Johannes Triebel reviews the Christian missionary influence in Tanzania, exploring the ways in which mission Christianity, with its external origin, approached the Africans it encountered and how it was appropriated locally. Missionary work would have been impossible without the framework of colonial rule and contributed to it in many ways, but Triebel maintains that an encounter of cultures, rather than conflict, characterized the relationship between missions and Tanzanian society. Juhani Koponen studies German colonial exploration and research about Tanzania from the explorers of the 1890s to the establishment of the Colonial Institute in Hamburg in 1908. While many of the empirical results of this research are of course outdated today, Kuponen argues that the epistemological framework created around the turn of the century still constitutes a living heritage. Even the great majority of Tanzanians who have never directly confronted German colonial studies are unlikely to have escaped its influence (p. 134).

Organized around the themes of history, colonialism and development, the book contains a number of well-researched and conceptually up-to-date essays based on primary sources that are difficult to access otherwise. The empirical depth of the essays contrasts somewhat with the other declared aim of the book (or rather, of the lecture series from which the book emerged): to provide an introduction to Tanzania for a broader readership. The fact that the book contains an appendix with some basic data about Tanzania and a number of further bibliographic references indicates that the editors were aware of this tension.

Centre for Modern Oriental Studies, Berlin

Axel Harneit-Sievers

SLAVERY IN THE MASCAREIGNES


Slavery and the slave trade are favourite topics in historical research these days, and the Indian Ocean, being a virgin field compared to the Atlantic, immediately attracts attention. But those going to Deryck Scarr’s book, with so general a title as Slaving and Slavery in the Indian Ocean, without even a sub-title to indicate its limited scope, will be immediately and immensely disappointed.

The book deals entirely with the former French islands in the south-west corner of the Indian Ocean, which are arguably an extension of the Atlantic slave system, and has little in common with that around the northern rim of the Indian Ocean. Apart from some of the slaves coming from the East African coast and Mozambique, as well as Madagascar, the book has nothing to say about the main arena of slavery and the slave trade farther north. Admittedly, the author did not set out in the book to deal with the broader subject; often a publisher’s desire to attract a wider market leads to a misleading title.

The book deals with the Mascareignes, as Mauritius (Ile de France), Réunion (Bourbon) and Seychelles were collectively if loosely known, during the transition...
from French to British rule at the turn of the nineteenth century. He clearly sees the relevant comparison with the Caribbean-centred literature on the subject, and the spectre of Saint Domingue – of slave revolts, *marronage*, poisoning and murder by slaves – haunts his subjects, the slave owners of the Mascareignes, throughout the book.

The major theme of the book is the interaction between the slave owners and the British conquerors of these islands during the Napoleonic wars. Fired by their worldwide anti-slavery crusade, the British were faced with the problem of pacifying their new colonies and sustaining their slave-based economies. This was not the first time that the British had to face this dilemma, nor the last. It is not surprising that some of those in authority in the colonies developed cold feet, and even soiled their hands, while the crusaders in London had difficulties marrying their high moral stances with the realities of the slave colonies.

Unfortunately the book is so cluttered with names of people, anecdotes and details that it is as difficult to pick the gems from it as it would be on a broad beach of brilliant white sand. The author seems to believe that any information about a particular person he has come across in the archives in the Mascareignes, London and France must be relevant to the point being discussed. And he has a way of constructing such long sentences that often run up to 100 words, with numerous sub-clauses, that one has to read each sentence twice to keep track of the argument. For instance:

Divorced in Ile de France in 1793, not visibly with slave evidence given, though that was known, and remarried next year on what he described as anarchic but stuporous Mahe at the age of 46 to the 27-year-old divorcée Marie Joseph Duboil, de Quinssy himself, with seven legitimate children to support and his own compendiously documented sins all to do with money and the slave trade, may reasonably be taken to have had other kinds of service to reward when he freed the creole Seychellois slave Marguerite with 27 arpents of land and two slaves in 1812.

The book is peppered with interesting details on unbelievable types of punishments meted out to slaves, including breaking of bones and burning to death; on mortality in the slave trade; on maroons and slave revolts; on creoles as well as slaves owning other slaves; on the large number of Indian and Malay as well as African and Malagasy slaves in the Mascareignes, contrary to the common belief that Indians were taken there only as free contract labour. However, with the author’s tedious prose, only a committed specialist on Mascareigne history will have the energy and patience to go through the book to glean the information on the actual practice and demographics of slavery in the south-west corner of the Indian Ocean.

*Zanzibar*

**ABDUL SHERIFF**

**GENDER AND COLONIAL HISTORY**


*Gendered Colonialisms in African History* is the first volume of a new Blackwell series designed to increase the availability of path-breaking work on the gender dimension of past societies published in the journal, *Gender and History*. This reprint of a 1996 special issue is an impressive start to the series. In a masterful introductory essay, Nancy Rose Hunt traces the evolution of the study of gender
in colonial African history. She points out that an initial focus on the economically productive activities and social agency of African women, gave way to a second wave (the ‘colonialism and culture’ school), which turned to questions of gender meanings and relations, colonial domesticity, customary law, motherhood, reproduction, sexuality and the body. While scholars continue to work in both these traditions, Hunt argues that a third wave of gender scholarship is emerging that focuses on studies of masculinity, the formation of subjective, social and institutional identities and on generational and homosocial struggles. She identifies this work with a subtle, cautious ‘post-’ move that draws on themes and vocabularies emanating from cultural studies such as representation, alterity, cultural production, commodity culture and transnationalism.

The essays in this collection are fine examples of this new approach. They both provoke and entice as they reveal new ways of engendering African colonial history. An overarching theme emerges — colonialism cannot be seen simply as an imposition by singular European metropoles, as a playing out of binary dualisms such as colonizer/colonized or metropole/periphery. Rather, colonialism must be understood as “tangled layers of political relations” and lines of conflicting projections and domestications that converged in specific local misunderstandings, struggles, and representations’ (p. 4). The articles explore this complex, messy world. Lynn Thomas, for example, demonstrates the futility of explaining struggles over circumcision in the 1950s simply as an example of resistance to colonialism. Kenyans both supported and resisted the ban, aligning along generational, gender and class lines. Keith Shear demonstrates how struggles over women’s efforts to join the South African police led to a hypermasculinized version of policing, which played a key role in the apartheid disciplinary state. David Graeber, in his study of love potions and political morality in Central Madagascar, rejects the primacy of colonial hegemony, focusing instead on African fears, fantasies and shifting social relations. He sees colonialism less as a key player in the lives of most Merina peoples, but rather as a force that required most people to reconsider their relations with each other. Tim Burke, in his study of capitalist advertising, points to the deeply gendered, Western-centric assumptions underlying advertising campaigns in Southern Africa. Yet at the same time, he suggests the need to consider the many local variations thrown up by colonial modernities.

Some themes remain unexplored. Thomas could have told us more about the few women and men who supported the ban on circumcision. Shear could have given us more insights into the way women experienced struggles to enter the police and Burke could have spent more time exploring the way African elites used consumer goods to buttress their own social position. Graeber might have explored the impact of French notions of morality on Malagasy notions of morality. But these quibbles aside, this is an exciting and indeed path-breaking set of essays, which raise important new questions both about substance and theory. It is a welcome addition to the work on gender and African colonial history.

*Dalhousie University*

*JANE L. PARPART*
The array of themes addressed in this study of the central Kenyan district of Murang’a (formerly Fort Hall) is impressive. The author wishes to connect political economy and environmental change and contends that gender is the factor that links them. She also incorporates several other factors, each of which constitutes a complex subject in its own right. These include land tenure and customary land law, the troubled history of colonial soil conservation, colonial agricultural research and the discourse of environmental improvement that it generated, the nutritional consequences of adopting processed seed, and women’s resistance under colonialism.

Mackenzie argues that whereas pre-colonial Kikuyu society placed little pressure on the environment (she is thinking primarily of the soil), colonial demands for labour and commodities forced farmers to intensify crop production (particularly by shortening fallows) and to divert labour from soil-conserving practices to making money. As demands on land and labour intensified, she continues, bitter struggles developed between Kikuyu men and women. Men redefined customary law to deprive women of their claims to land, shifted the burden of food production on to women, and claimed the proceeds of selling women’s crops. Women were further subordinated, she suggests, by a technicist environmental discourse which ignored the labour, skills and knowledge that they contributed to farming. Nevertheless, women resisted, concludes Mackenzie, doing so most effectively during the late 1940s when they protested compulsory hillside terracing.

Combining so many complicated themes in a single narrative is risky. One danger is that particular issues will be insufficiently developed or neglected altogether. Another is that unless juggled with surprising grace, themes will sometimes drop out of sight. To some extent this book suffers from both of these nearly unavoidable flaws. In particular, it neglects the vital question of post-First World War demographic change. Another danger is that in trying to weave a narrative from a large swatch of big themes, each of which has generated its own scholarly literature, fresher ideas may get lost. The first two chapters in particular contain a number of intriguing ideas that deserve elaboration. They concern the relationship between the individual and collectivity in pre-colonial society, the emphasis given to collective identities under colonialism, the nature of pre-colonial land tenure as a highly adaptable diversity of arrangements, the development of competing Kikuyu discourses about land rights and identity and the importance of extra-household relationships in Kikuyu society.

Social historians will benefit not only from these ideas, but also from Mackenzie’s comments about how women’s resistance depended upon ‘“submerged networks”...of kinship, neighbourhood, labour or trading’, and ‘the social threads created and interwoven by women in the daily course of events’ (pp. 206–7). Unfortunately, despite her assiduous use of the archives and receptiveness to signs of autonomous African agency, Mackenzie’s mostly archival sources do not allow her to pursue these highly suggestive thoughts. For she is pointing us towards forms of social activity with which the colonizers had very little familiarity and which consequently do not appear in their record.

Just as her thesis shows historians of African environment and political economy that gender must be at the centre of their enquiry, so too Mackenzie’s comments
about ‘submerged networks’ and ‘social threads’ bring us face to face with the choice of whether to write colonial or decolonized histories of gender. If in writing about African gender we rely on colonial representations from the archives, we will write colonial histories. Decolonizing the history of gender, by contrast, means finding ways of learning about the moral and social specificities of gender and kinship. It means thinking out gender in relation not simply to the household and marital relationship, but also to widely ramified family relations. It means thinking about the degrees of authority, deference and obligation inherent in particular relationships and conveyed by terms of address. It means that we must find ways of stepping inside these relationships to learn what it means to live them.

University of Iowa

JAMES L. GIBLIN

MUSLIM DIVERSITY


This is the rare case of a splendid and highly useful book whose conceptual focus is largely exceeded by its content. Its main focus, the encounters, tensions and conflicts between Sufi brotherhoods and Islamist movements in Africa, is reflected in several important regional case studies from West and East Africa. It is augmented by overview articles on supranational Islamic contacts and organizations, on Islam and the human rights situation in Sahelian Africa and on general Islamic developments in the Arab regions of Africa (North Africa, Egypt and Northern Sudan). Always stressing the diversity of Islam in Africa, and the tentativeness of any conceptual framework accounting for it, the editors have nevertheless attempted to boil down the tensions and clashes between Sufis and Islamists (whether ‘Wahhabis’ or others) to a basic distinction between ‘African Islam’ – represented by the Sufi brotherhoods – and ‘Islam in Africa’ – represented by Islamists and their organizations. Merging them with other dichotomies like ‘tradition vs. modernity’ and ‘periphery vs. centre’, they tend to place Sufism at the traditional or marginal end. Islamism, on the other hand, is linked up with modernity and the centre, with particular stress on its international connections.

It is, of course, very easy to criticize this dichotomous approach. An issue that is never addressed in the whole volume is the relative novelty of the spread of the Sufi brotherhoods in many parts of Subsaharan Africa, which precludes any general identification of Sufism with ‘local Islam’. The development of Sufi mass movements, so typical for West Africa in the colonial and early post-colonial period, was as much part of the process of modernization as that of their anti-Sufi opponents. The spread of Arab models of Islamic schools and of the teaching of Arabic was often pioneered by Sufi scholars and traders, sometimes long before the emergence of any anti-Sufi or Islamist movement. The contemporary role played by authors of Sufi background in the development of Arabic literature in Subsaharan Africa also makes it difficult to treat Sufism in Africa merely as ‘traditional’.

The contribution on the Maghrib (G. Joffé) perhaps comes closest to the framework of the volume by constructing an ‘eternal dichotomy’ between ‘Maghrabi Islam and Islam in the Maghrib’, based on the three-fold confrontation of Arab with Berber, urban with rural Islam and the scripturalism of the scholars with the mysticism of the Sufi orders. Even in the Maghrib, however, Sufism was
As much an urban as a rural phenomenon, adopted by Arabs and Berbers, practised and propagated by respected scholars as well as by commoners. Rural and even nomad scripturalism was no less significant for the spread of the Maliki madhhab than urban scholarship (cf. the Almoravids). The rise of the Fatimids and the Almohads also shows that the most successful local Islamic movements in the Maghrib were those with the most universal claims. At the same time, even a universal movement could not succeed without a strong ethnic power base (already noted by Ibn Khaldun). This makes it even more difficult to maintain the constructed dichotomy. This otherwise highly informative contribution thus highlights the conceptual problems of the book.

These problems are successfully tackled and practically overcome by T. Gerholm in his contribution on ‘The Islamization of contemporary Egypt’. By focusing on a three-fold distinction between ‘Establishment Islam’ (represented by al-Azhar University and the official religious institutions), ‘Sufi Islam’ (highly organized and expanding) and ‘Activist Islam’ (i.e. the Muslim Brotherhood and its radical offshoots), and by assessing the influence of these three major forms of organized Islam on the ‘mainstreamers’, i.e. the majority of the population, Gerholm arrives at a quite elaborate description of the factors that have led to an increased Islamization of public life in contemporary Egypt. It is only at the end of his survey that he tries to come back to the topic of the book, concluding that Egyptian Islam is both African Islam and Islam in Africa. The question does not seem to have been of much relevance to the Egyptian situation.

‘African Islam’ somehow looks like a revised version of the ‘Islam noir’ of the French colonial administrators who were trying as much as possible to isolate their Muslim subjects from any ‘dangerous influence’ from abroad. It might appear to African Muslims no less artificial and alien than the earlier concept. The Islamic educational canon, mysticism and even esoteric literature and practice in Africa have always been related to international Islamic models and developments, as have the Islamist trends and movements today. On the other hand, both Sufi brotherhoods and Islamist movements and groups make use of highly localized patterns of social and political action.

This conceptual reservation should not distract from the great value and quality of this well-edited volume, which offers a wealth of highly topical case studies and discussions of local and international factors in the development of Islam in contemporary Africa.

Ruhr-Universität, Bochum

Stefan Reichmuth

The Kaiser’s South African Blustering


Previous work on German involvement in South Africa, Seligmann writes, has been either ideologically constrained or restricted to the period of the Kruger telegram and thereafter. We thus lack studies that explain the origins of German interest in South Africa in the years before 1896 based on a broad range of archival sources. This is the gap the book seeks to fill.

Following John Röhl, the pre-eminent biographer of Wilhelm II, Seligmann argues that the shift in 1897 to the new Weltpolitik was a reflection of the Kaiser’s own political ambitions. This matches the ‘personal rule thesis’. The author thus tends to downplay the influence of Germany’s right-wing pressure groups, especially the Navy League and the Pan-German League. He stresses instead the
role of the Kaiser and the ‘ease with which personality was able to dominate the
direction of diplomacy’ (p. 20). However, as Seligmann himself reveals, the
Kaiser’s ambitious plans to place the Boer republics under a German protectorate
in case of British invasion were discreetly buried by the diplomats in the
Wilhelmstrasse. So much for ‘personal rule’. Here, as elsewhere, the evidence
contradicts the thesis. Not that Seligmann is unaware of the pressure groups. The
German Colonial Society and the Pan-German League demanded that the
government protest at the British annexation of Amatongaland because this
deprieved Germany of direct contact with the Transvaal. Yet he sees the right-wing
agitation in support of the telegram only as a reaction, not as a part of the cause.

A brief chapter on German economic interest in southern Africa questions the
notion that the influential German business community on the Rand automatically
lent its loyalty to the Reich. For good commercial reasons, some, notably the
mining magnates, looked to Britain, while others in the railway and banking
sectors, who were favoured by the monopoly concessions of the Transvaal
government, found their interests well served by the South African republic and
hence owed loyalty by extension to the German government which supported
Kruger. Seligmann rejects the claim that economic interests dictated both initial
German support for Kruger and the disengagement in 1896–7, emphasizing
instead the autonomy of German foreign policy formulation, which used economic
arguments to justify imperialist policy. The long, closely argued central chapter on
the emergence of conflict in 1893–6, develops this thesis with convincing use of
sources. Moreover, the Kruger telegram itself was no mere whim of the Kaiser. It
was the foreign secretary, Marschall von Bieberstein, who toyed with the threat of
continental alliance against Britain, considered sending German troops to aid
Kruger, and was the real author of the telegram.

Commenting in October 1895 on the likely effect of German interference in
South Africa, the German ambassador in London, Hatzfeldt, predicted there were
two possible outcomes: ‘an immediate binding agreement or nothing. Since the
first is not possible here in a formal sense, by our actions we push the English to
choose the second and to seek other understandings and leanings’ (p. 62). Yes,
precisely. One wonders why the German government proceeded despite this clear
warning. But then imperial German governments developed a habit of ignoring
their London ambassador. German desire to use the Transvaal to put pressure on
the British hardly provides a credible explanation for the provocative blustering
Germany engaged in over the Jameson Raid. Seligmann thus justifiably rejects the
old idea that Germany was attempting to gain an alliance with Britain by
antagonizing it and threatening war over South Africa. The theory of Robinson
and Gallagher that Germany had no genuine interest in the Transvaal, but wanted
to exploit tension there to gain concessions from Britain elsewhere, is likewise
convincingly refuted. Germany had real colonial aspirations in the Transvaal,
because of its strategic location between South-West Africa and Angra Pequen,
existing commercial interests and the purported ‘Teutonic’ nature of the Boer
settlers. The author has amassed a substantial body of evidence for a ‘forward’
imperialist policy, such as the German naval visits to Lourenço Marques and the
anti-British tone of the celebrations marking the opening of the Delagoa Bay
railway.

However, none of this entirely explains the ultimately irrational provocation and
subsequent disengagement. Because Seligmann implicitly rejects Wolfgang
Mommsen’s argument that Weltpolitik was an ‘imperialism without object’ which
was primarily motivated by domestic policy and had no definable limit, he does not
attempt a richer interpretation linking bourgeois popular opinion, the legitimizing
function of imperialism and the inherent instability of the political system.

Nevertheless, this is a competent, readable monograph (despite repetitions in
 chapter 5), important for anyone studying the politics of conflict between imperial powers in southern Africa.

Trinity College, Dublin

ALAN KRAMER

‘FRIEND OF THE PEOPLE’


Sol Plaatje is best known as the author of Native Life in South Africa, a searing account of the effects of the 1913 Natives’ Land Act on rural African populations. He was also one of the founding members of the South African Native National Congress (later renamed the African National Congress) and as a political activist pursued the ever elusive goal contained in Cecil Rhodes’s famous dictum, ‘Equal rights for all civilized men’. In addition to being a political analyst and activist, Plaatje was also a skilled literary translator and novelist, a court interpreter, a journalist and a devoted friend and family man. Although Plaatje is known for his political work, after reading his many articles, letters and out-of-print pamphlets collected and edited by Brian Willan in this volume, the reader has the distinct impression that part of Plaatje’s political success was a direct result of his other accomplishments and of his personality.

Willan uses a light editorial hand throughout the book. The presentation of Plaatje’s writings is strictly chronological, with Willan supplying only a brief context before each entry. (Readers might find it useful to have a copy of Willan’s biography of Plaatje – Sol Plaatje: South African Nationalist, 1876–1932 [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984] – at hand to have access to a broader context). Willan breaks Plaatje’s writings into three periods and provides three short introductory essays, as well as a very brief ‘Introduction’ and an equally brief ‘Prelude’ covering Plaatje’s early life. These three chronological periods also correspond to different phases in Plaatje’s public writings. In the period 1899–1910, Plaatje was a court interpreter and journalist and embarked upon his career as a political commentator. By 1910–23, Plaatje’s life was consumed by his attempts to achieve political justice for Africans in South Africa; he continued to write articles, but he also began to travel extensively, making political contacts and keeping up with them and trying to influence those who had power to do what they could for his cause. Native Life in South Africa was completed in this period, and a short excerpt is included in this volume. The third phase covers Plaatje’s life from 1924 until his death in 1932. In his later years, Plaatje continued with his political work, but also ranged more deeply into the field of literature. He translated three Shakespearian plays into Setswana (only one translation survived, that of A Comedy of Errors, excerpted here), wrote his own novel, Mhudi, and campaigned for the acceptance of Setswana as a literary language.

Plaatje’s political aspirations focused upon the equality he (and other Africans of his generation) felt was implicit in the British political system. Plaatje first achieved fame during the South African War, as he posted news stories from Mafeking during the siege. Having witnessed African participation on the British side during that conflict, he felt that Africans could legitimately claim the right to political participation: ‘We do not hanker after social equality with the white man. If anyone tells that we do so, he is a lunatic, and should be put in chains. We do not care for your parlour, nor is it our wish to lounge on couches in your drawing room…All we claim is our just dues; we ask for our political recognition as loyal
British subjects...Presently, under the British Constitution every MAN so qualified is his neighbour’s political equal, therefore anyone who argues to the contrary...is a rebel at heart’ (p. 54).

Plaatje was a tireless writer. He edited and wrote much of his own newspaper from 1910 to 1915 (initially called Tsala ea Becoana – Bechuana Friend – then renamed Tsala ea Batho, Friend of the People). He regularly contributed to The Diamond Fields Advertiser and to Pretoria News, as well as occasionally writing for Umteteli wa Bantu – The Voice of the People – and for the Cape Times. He authored numerous pamphlets, particularly The Mote and the Beam (included in this volume), which Plaatje himself described as ‘a disquisition on a delicate social problem known to Europeans in South Africa as the Black Peril and to the Bantu as the White Peril’ (p. 397). In addition, Plaatje wrote at great length on the major issues of his day to a variety of friends, acquaintances and officials, mobilizing his social and political connections to protect and promote the vulnerable rights of Africans.

Brian Willan has already written the definitive biography of Plaatje, but by bringing out this volume of selected writings, he adds greater depth to the historical figure. Particularly in his personal letters, Plaatje emerges as a charming, polite, witty and caring person. Plaatje was a parent devastated by his daughter Olive’s untimely death and concerned about his eldest son’s grades. He worried about the effects his own political activism was having on his family’s finances, and he expressed concern about his friends’ lives in his lengthy correspondence. These concerns are not just interesting sidelights to Plaatje’s public career; they are also important to understanding his effectiveness and limitations as a political leader. When Plaatje tried to use his political connections to affect events, officials and friends often did assist him, but they seemed to do so out of a sense of personal loyalty rather than out of respect for the political clout of Africans as a group. Moreover, the fact that African political organizations were routinely short of money seriously compromised their development and also forced leaders such as Plaatje to choose which they would sacrifice – their political programmes or their familial relationships and standards of living. All of Plaatje’s charm and learning could not overcome these obstacles. This volume of Plaatje’s writings provides valuable insights into the life of one of the major figures of early twentieth-century African nationalism.

Amherst College

PIioneer OF BLACK CONSCiOuSNESS


Anton Lembede’s ideas achieved canonical status in 1978 with the publication of Gail Gerhart’s Black Power in South Africa. Gerhart’s study concerned itself with the evolution of black consciousness traditions in South African political thought and she accorded recognition to Lembede as a pioneering figure in an intellectual lineage that was later embodied in Robert Sobukwe and Steve Biko. The biographical preface that accompanies this collection of Lembede’s writings adds flesh to the life history traced in Gerhart’s volume. In particular, Edgar and Msumza supply useful insights into the formative experience that contributed to the four years of Lembede’s political ascendancy at the helm of the African National Congress Youth League, between 1944 and his early death in 1947. These
included his childhood in the home of a farm labourer, Catholic mission-school education, teacher training at Adams College and teaching in Free State where he first encountered Afrikaner nationalism. He completed three degrees through correspondence and served legal articles in Johannesburg. Here he first made contact with organized African politics. As an activist, he made a signal contribution in developing a philosophical base for his generation’s challenge to the genteel authority of the sedentary elders who had presided over the ANC’s declining fortunes since the First World War.

Lembede’s political ideas were premised on his conviction that each nation has its own peculiar unique character and that national communities were subject to Darwin’s eternal law of variations. In such a social universe, no nation could find common philosophical ground with another. Africans, continentally, formed a single nation, reflecting a uniform cultural predisposition derived from a spirit of the environment, in other words, a social consciousness formed by adaption to the geography of a particular region. Such adaptions in the case of the coloured races endowed their members with physical superiority.

Black South Africans were participants in a colonial national struggle that was indivisible from other struggles on the continent. Accordingly, they should avoid engagement with foreign ideologies such as communism, and they should recognise the political imperatives of racial solidarity as opposed to those arising from class oppression. Uncompromising ideological emphasis on African racial identity represented for Anton Lembede the most effective antidote to a pathology of inferiority, a state of mind perpetuated by dependence on liberal or Marxist allies. Africans had no need for such external sources of inspiration; in their ultimate state of self-realization, they would be naturally socialist and democratic.

As an essayist, Lembede’s strengths derived from logical rigour and lucid expression. Even so, his arguments are neither attractive nor persuasive nor original. As his editors concede, much of his thought was influenced by the biological determinism that was such a staple ingredient in the scientific racism that accompanied totalitarian nationalism. If his ideas embodied his primary legacy, what is one to make of his flirtation with fascism? To Edgar and Msumza, this represents merely a blind alley, but if one subtracts from Lembede’s testament his racial essentialism there is not much of substance left. In the obituary tributes to Lembede from his associates reprinted in this volume, there are many admiring references to his academic accomplishments and oratorial gifts. Significantly, though, none of his peers appeared at the time of his death especially interested in the content and implications of Lembede’s thinking, notwithstanding their claims that his language touched the inner chords of the African people. However, with the recent advent of another African renaissance, Anton Lembede’s texts may yet find a fresh assembly disciples. If so, they will have good reason to be grateful to the conscientious scholarship which has sustained the editing of this elegant volume.

University of the Witwatersrand

HERERO ‘SELF-PEASANTIZATION’


Schlettwein Publishing in association with the Basler Afrika Bibliographien, which rightly prides itself on being the only Namibia resource centre in Europe,
has begun publishing academic theses that deal with Namibian history. As a result, Namibian history, a thoroughly under-researched area, has become more accessible. The books are attractively produced and printed in South Africa, thus ensuring that they remain within the price range of people living in southern Africa.

Werner's book was originally submitted as a doctoral thesis at the University of Cape Town in 1989 and quickly became a standard work, with increasingly illegible photocopies of it being passed around within an expanding community of historians dealing with central Namibia. It is now published with the addition of a limited index.

The study focuses on economic determinants in the reconstitution of Herero society in the aftermath of Imperial Germany's occupation of Namibia. Werner seeks to apply the concept of 'self-peasantization' and looks at the manner in which Herero, who had been robbed of their land and cattle during the German occupation, reacquired cattle and re-established a society based on pastoralism and labour tenancy, firstly on squatted crown lands and later on newly established reserves.¹

The book takes us on the roller-coaster ride that is the Namibian economy in the interregnum and shows us the manner in which Herero society was influenced by economic developments, as well as the manner in which Herero sought to influence these economic developments. Werner neatly outlines how reacquiring cattle and land stimulated the development of Herero ethnic consciousness coupled with a conscious attempt to withdraw from colonial control. Developments that were reflected in a near universal rejection of missionary teachings, the reintroduction of male circumcision and the establishment of a country wide paramilitary self-help organization known to the colonial administration as the Truppenspieler (Soldier players).²

Extensive coverage is given to economic developments, particularly in settler agriculture, the sector of the economy that, having appropriated the former lands of the Herero, now directly competed with the Herero for their labour and their products. In reference to the reserves, into which the Herero were being forced, Chief Hoseah Kutako noted:

> In fact it is a desert where no human being ever lived before. It is a country only good for wild beasts. On top of that it is not healthy for the people or the cattle... You should rather bring the Europeans here and let us stay where we are... (p. 105).

Even so, Herero continued to compete with settler farmers, who unwilling to countenance the economic competition of the Herero, complained to the colonial administration of 'syphilitic natives... permitted to handle dairy products' (p. 191). Settler demands were equally shameless: 'such butter, if permitted on the open market, should be graded fourth grade and marked or stamped “Native butter for cooking purposes only”' (p. 192). Be that as it may, by 1946 Herero society was far from the cowed huddle of survivors which had come through the Herero-German war.

¹ Terence Ranger coined the term 'self-peasantization' to refer to the process by which Africans became peasants to resist having to become labourers for the settler market. Ranger developed this concept by enlarging upon the earlier work of Sharon Stichter: Capitalism and African Responses, cited in Terence Ranger, Peasant Consciousness and Guerilla War in Zimbabwe (Harare, 1985), 26–31.
Thankfully, Werner’s attempt to cast his excellent work within the confines of ‘self-peasantization’, though dating the work, in no way obfuscates the dramatic and immensely readable history of a people reestablishing themselves. Unfortunately, Werner does have the tendency to hop around chronologically. A case in point is his discussion of the Truppenspieler in the period 1915–19, which is substantiated with a source that relates to 1940 (p. 82). The addition of photographs and additional maps would have improved the work, and their absence will be sorely missed, particularly for those new to Namibian history.

In conclusion, this book will continue to be a standard work for years to come, and is not to be missed by anyone dealing with Namibian or Southern African socio-economic history.

Lauren Dobell’s book is an admirable analysis of the politics of SWAPO, Namibia’s major nationalist movement. Her primary thesis is that the SWAPO leadership in exile pursued its struggle for Namibian independence largely through diplomatic means. This strategy meant that the ideological alignment of the movement was pragmatic rather than broadly-based, reflecting its attempts to position itself to advantage among shifting global forces. Dobell argues that the leadership had no deep commitment to wealth redistribution after independence, and that its socialist rhetoric was generated by its relations with eastern bloc countries and so easily shed after the Cold War ended.

According to Dobell, SWAPO’s commitment to action on the diplomatic stage led to a neglect of other areas, chiefly the radicalism of younger SWAPO members joining the movement in Angola and political activism within Namibia itself. The authoritarian character of the movement inclined it to suppress real or imagined challenges to its leadership, such as the ‘rebellion’ of 1976, when PLAN fighters and newcomers to exile protested against internal disorganization and corruption. SWAPO partly admitted the charges and made some concessions to greater openness, but imprisoned many of the protesters. Nor did the movement in exile, concerned above all to exert control, accord much authority to the SWAPO leadership inside Namibia.

Moving on from the period of exile, the author outlines the settlement over Namibia and the transition to independence in 1989–90. In the final section of the book, she argues that, in the post-independence period, the SWAPO government has had to steer a course between the broad economic and political forces constraining its actions – the ‘politics of power’ – and the demands of SWAPO’s support base – the ‘politics of support’. The book concludes with an analysis of the SWAPO Congress of 1991, at which the leadership was challenged and on occasion defeated by the delegates, as ordinary members increasingly began to find a voice.

If aspects of Dobell’s story – particularly SWAPO’s reactions to dissent – are well-known, her book nevertheless adds significantly to our understanding of the political forces at play in Namibia’s recent past. It is based on documentation produced by SWAPO at key moments in its history, but the author – partly by means of numerous interviews – skilfully places these texts in their political context. SWAPO’s Struggle for Namibia is a refreshingly dispassionate account of
a subject on which, as Dobell points out, most comment has until recently been overtly partisan. As such it is part of a growing post-independence literature that has been able to treat the politics of the struggle as a subject of analysis rather than a matter of faith (see, in particular, Colin Leys and John Saul [eds.], Namibia's Liberation Struggle: The Two-Edged Sword [London, 1995]). The author carefully maintains a sense of balance, arguing against judging SWAPO too harshly and in favour of pragmatism. At the same time, however, she discusses the tragedy of such episodes as the detention and torture of SWAPO members suspected of spying during the 1980s.

Dobell’s argument that global politics, rather than internal processes, have been the most important factor in dictating SWAPO’s ideological stance is supported by her perceptive analysis of a wealth of evidence and explains in large part the changes in the movement’s rhetoric over the last ten or fifteen years. Arguably, however, the author underplays the role of non-diplomatic strategies. In particular, she has very little to say about SWAPO’s military campaigns (although the importance of the gains made in 1988–9 by Cuban, Angolan and SWAPO forces is briefly mentioned). This is, perhaps, a limitation of her methodology, but if military strategy does not appear to be outlined in the programmatic documents she analyzes, this does not necessarily make it unimportant.

Ultimately, SWAPO’s Struggle for Namibia raises a new series of questions. Dobell’s analysis of SWAPO’s documentation reveals a split between leadership and mass membership, the latter being more inclined to favour the redistribution of wealth. Many complexities remain unaddressed here, however. The diffusion of ideologies – socialist and nationalist – within the movement merits exploration and analysis, as do a broader range of issues including the social and economic bases of the elite and the effect of exile on pre-existing social cleavages and networks. While many of these issues could not be covered in a book such as this, there is a strong case for the multi-disciplinary study of the last few decades of Namibian history.

Dobell’s book is nevertheless of major importance in understanding past and contemporary politics in Namibia. In the week of writing this review, a new political party has been formed by Ben Ulenga, a long-standing SWAPO activist (operating within the country, not in exile), trades unionist and, after independence, government minister and diplomat. This book goes a long way toward suggesting the pre-existing tensions and conflicts precipitating his decision to split from SWAPO.

Public Record Office

THE ECONOMICS OF DECOLONIZATION


In this welcome contribution to the growing literature on the economic underpinnings of African decolonization, Robert Tignor offers an original and challenging interpretation that offers little comfort either to dependency theorists or to champions of the metropolitan ‘transfer of power’ model. His comparative study examines three important African examples, although the greater part of the book is devoted to discussion of Egypt, a field in which the author is an established authority. Addressing an old question from a new perspective, Tignor seeks to evaluate the role of nationalist groups, the changing metropolitan outlook and the
wider background of shifting international relations. Specifically, he aims to establish the extent to which business interests contributed to decolonization, the relationship between business and nationalist movements and the degree to which nationalist elites exercised influence over the business sector. He argues that in all three cases, nationalist movements were influential in shaping relations between the state and both business and expatriate capital, and that the very different post-independence political economies that resulted were the product of nationalist pressure.

Tignor’s basic conclusion is that economic considerations were not uppermost in the minds of metropolitan policy-makers, and that expatriate business was not, after all, decisive in shaping the outcome of decolonization in any of these three cases. Whether business voiced its concern at imperial policy (as in the Egyptian case) or whether it adapted to the changing political climate made little difference in practice. Thus, for example, when British property in Egypt was threatened by violence early in 1952, wider political and strategic considerations argued against the use of readily available British military force. By the same token, imperial calculations that resulted in the Suez fiasco in 1956 were apparently untroubled by concern for the likely commercial consequences of military intervention. Post-Suez Egyptian nationalism was sympathetic neither to expatriate nor indigenous business, as is shown by the extensive nationalization programme that ensued, a policy inspired by both the left and right-wing traditions within the nationalist movement.

In Nigeria, meanwhile, expatriate business viewed political developments with unease, but similarly failed to affect the course of decolonization. The colonial state, whose relations with British firms had at times been strained in the past, increasingly distanced itself from business organisations as political devolution gathered pace. Confronted by the entrenchment of state commodity marketing, the statist aspirations of regional governments and the loss of their traditional political voice in colonial legislatures, together with gathering fears for Nigeria’s political stability, British firms maintained their role, albeit a diminishing one, within an increasingly politicised economic climate in which the trend was towards further nationalization and Africanisation of enterprises.

In Kenya, too, the role of British business was marginal to decolonization. Having survived the upheaval of Mau Mau, the state successfully protected the interests of many expatriate businesses, while being forced to abandon some of its post-war interventionism. Kenya’s independence settlement required the soothing of traditional nationalist discontent over land alienation. The Africanisation of prime land in the White Highlands immediately prior to independence was promoted by the state and settler interests despite protests from firms in the modernised sectors of the economy who feared the effects land transfers would have on foreign investors’ confidence.

The author affirms that in all three countries examined nationalist movements on the whole succeeded in achieving their long-standing economic goals, and in so doing lends fresh support to nationalist interpretations of decolonization at the expense of rival metropolitan and international perspectives. He specifically refutes the allegation that United States interests, either business or governmental, played a significant role in decolonization; even in Egypt, where US business was well-established, Washington’s policy, like London’s, was shaped primarily by geopolitical, not commercial, considerations.

Tignor makes a persuasive, elegant and lucidly expressed argument. He displays an impressive familiarity with a wide range of government and business records, which form the greater part of the evidence employed He is equally comfortable with the voluminous secondary literature on this subject. Despite a few small editorial slips (including references to Reginald ‘Maulding’), and the more
serious, and regrettable, absence of a full bibliography, this book is stimulating and provocative. Its findings deserve to be considered seriously and tested against an even wider range of examples of African decolonization.

University of Luton

L. J. Butler

ERITREA: AN ETHIOPIAN VIEW


This book is concerned with a critical period in Eritrea's history. The 1940s and 1950s saw the maturing of political consciousness, manifest in the appearance of political parties and saw Eritreans, or their supposed representatives, given the opportunity to consider their future status. Decisions made during these years would have deadly consequences. The compromise federal arrangement, in which Eritrea became an autonomous unit within the Ethiopian state, came into being in 1952; ten years later, Eritrea was fully incorporated into Ethiopia. This entire period is therefore of enormous importance in comprehending Eritrea's modern historical development, but while Tekeste Negash has availed himself of some rich archival sources, this is an unsatisfactory work betraying a political standpoint that undermines the author's historical professionalism. His central argument is that Ethiopia had no responsibility for dismantling the federation, but that rather it was Eritreans who systematically undermined Eritrean autonomy and pushed for unconditional union. Indeed the author actually suggests that Ethiopia did not even want Eritrea, an argument not supported by any serious evidence and which in any case the author himself repeatedly disproves.

The Christians of the Eritrean highlands are presented as a fickle and cynical group who first of all worked for union with their Abyssinian brothers and later violently took over the liberation struggle. Having won independence, the EPLF then proceeded to distort history according to a nationalist agenda. But there is no serious attempt to examine the changing attitudes of Christians or indeed any other group in Eritrean society during the period under examination. The author is correct to warn against a 'backward reading of history', i.e. that the nationalism of the EPLF has not been the sole expression of Eritrean identity, but Tekeste Negash has tumbled over himself going forwards in completely dismissing the basis for modern Eritrean nationalism and refusing to credit the EPLF with either achievements or political programme.

The Unionist Party is depicted as a well-oiled machine with popular support, a clear programme and talented leaders; the 'separatist' parties, however, including the Muslim League and the Liberal Progressive Party, are dismissed as virtually insignificant, with confused leadership and 'internal contradictions'. But it is the contradictions in the narrative which are rather more apparent. Initially, we are told that the United Nations' compromise decision regarding federation was the best possible solution as it managed to please everyone; later, however, it is argued that it was unworkable, ambiguous and pleased no-one, least of all Haile Selassie. Implied support by the author for Ethiopia's historical claims to the Red Sea coast is apparent throughout; yet he finishes by asserting that Ethiopia never controlled the coast before the 1952–91 period as part of his dubious argument that Ethiopia did not need Eritrea. The fact that from 1952 Ethiopia treated Eritrea 'like any other province of the empire' undermines the entire 'Eritrean Unionism' thesis as it indicates the imperial government’s disregard for the federal arrangement from the beginning. Moreover, Tedla Bairu, the first chief executive of the federal
government in Asmara, is demonized as having almost single-handedly dismantled Eritrean autonomy without assistance from Addis Ababa; yet we are also told that the Emperor’s representative in Asmara was politically more important than the chief executive, who was merely the former’s ‘errand boy’.

The inclusion of a concluding chapter on the independence struggle, inadequately described as a religious civil war between the ELF and the EPLF, throws a revealing light on much of the earlier discussion. The ELF’s decision to take up arms can be seen as consistent with the aims of the Muslim League. Explanation of the EPLF’s early motives and programme is, however, wholly unsatisfactory; we are not told why so many supposedly unionist highlanders took up arms, although we are told that the movement was bigoted and intransigent. The achievement of Eritrean independence, according to Tekeste, was more the result of Ethiopian mistakes than of the renowned military skills of the liberation forces, which is only one final attempt by the author to rubbish both the concept and the reality of an independent Eritrea. Concluding remarks regarding Ethiopia’s ‘humane political culture’, the security of Eritreans living in Ethiopia and the generous ‘facilitation’ of independent Eritrea on the part of Ethiopia have not only been shown to be premature, they are fundamental misjudgements of a complex historical relationship that the author has failed properly to examine.

University of Asmara

AFRICAN SPECIALIST IN THE FCO


Forty years ago the Journal of African History would have found it hard to justify the inclusion of a review of a memoir by a British diplomat. Up to Ghana’s independence in 1957 the Foreign Office’s only responsibility in Africa was that of staffing the embassy in Cairo and the legation in Ethiopia, the locale of Evelyn Waugh’s hilarious pre-war novel Black Mischief. Independence in Africa changed all that, and after 1966 it was the reconstructed Foreign and Commonwealth Office and no longer the Colonial Office that provided Britain’s top officials in Africa. Since then the FCO has had to staff missions – on and often off – in some 35 African countries. Here is a new resource and perception on the African state to set beside colonial, nationalist and occasionally commercial interpretations.

Harry Brind was one of that new entry, becoming head of missions in – uniquely – no less than four African countries. He was in Uganda in Idi Amin’s notorious presidency, in Mauritius and in Somalia, and in Malawi in the twilight (but not yet the sunset) years of Hastings Banda’s lifelong leadership. Though Brind chooses for his sub-title ‘Diplomatic Memoirs’, he devotes one sixth of his well-written and comfortably readable narrative to his years (1951–60) as a colonial administrator in transitional Ghana, thereby bringing added value to Africanist readers.

Selecting the offer of Kampala over Bogota for his first FCO posting abroad in 1971 – like many a ‘West African’, Brind felt he had to see and compare East Africa – he found himself dealing first with Milton Obote, reputedly on bad terms with British high commissioners and then with Idi Amin who, Bourbon-like, appeared to have ‘learned nothing, forgotten nothing’. Entertainingly, he quotes one of Alan Coren’s lampoons of Amin in Punch, about ‘dis Brind item shovin’ his nose into de pussanal affairs’, dangerously quoted by Brind’s schoolboy son as he disembarked at Entebbe. Mauritius was a deserved change after harrowing Uganda, an untypical Third World country: c’est magnifique, mais ce n’est pas
l’Afrique. Somalia, on the other hand, once held by Margery Perham to be ‘the quintessence of Africa’, generated little enthusiasm in its new British ambassador. Brind is interesting on the Somalis, whom he found convinced they were never wrong and suffering from delusions of adequacy. After nine years under the FCO’s East Africa Department, he nearly chalked up another FCO record when they toyed with the idea of his return to Ghana as High Commissioner. Instead of the Iceland he wanted after Mogadishu, Brind got Malawi. In the event, these were to be among the African years he enjoyed most.

Narrative apart, *Lying Abroad* carries one further level of interest to the historical researcher. In Brind, the FCO found – and fashioned – a diplomat with African experience. He was one of the few diplomats who had an African specialization in his FCO career. Yet an unexpectedly high proportion of Britain’s African heads of mission (and many of lesser rank) did bring into the FCO in the 1960s–1980s an additional measure of African experience unknown to the conventional FCO entry. This was previous service in the Colonial Administrative or Sudan Political Service – eight ambassadors came from the latter stable, two successively back to Khartoum. Brind was one of this cadre, having spent ten years in the colonial service in Africa before gaining admission to the CRO in 1960. For him (or her) who dares, the attraction of mounting a witness-seminar on the perceptions of the ‘ex-colonial’ on his new diplomatic work (and on his colleagues – and vice-versa!) is considerable. It is a career issue that Brind takes up in his important final chapter.

Readers will find *Lying Abroad* (the title derives from a well-known seventeenth-century definition of an ambassador as ‘an honest man, sent to lie abroad for the good of his country’) as enjoyable and satisfying as Brind found his years in Africa, above all his first job in colonial Gold Coast: ‘I sometimes wonder whether I ever had such responsibility as I had as an ADC within weeks of arrival in the Gold Coast until I became acting high commissioner in Uganda, more than twenty years later’.

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A. H. M. Kirk-Greene

**RELIGION AND VIOLENCE**


The opening sentence of this volume promises ‘a comprehensive analysis of the religious violence and conflicts prevalent in Nigeria since the 1970s’. The study is based on data gathered during two years (1992–3) of ‘extensive interviews throughout Nigeria’, where the author and his ‘many assistants collected information from hundreds of religious-riots victims, religious leaders, politicians, members of the military, and other shapers of Nigerian politics’. Additional materials include: ‘detailed ethnographic data’; ‘major religious sermons in different Nigerian languages’ in audio-cassettes, leaflets and pamphlets; and ‘questionnaires administered to hundreds of people at different locations.’ (pp. xvii–xviii). The volume provides a lot of information on the major Muslim-Christian violent conflicts that since the mid-1970s have increased in frequency, intensity and brutality. Arguing against single factor explanations in much of the literature on religious conflict in Nigeria, the author opts for ‘an eclectic framework’ to account for religious conflicts in terms of political instability, ethnic/religious diversity, poverty, modernization, foreign affairs and militancy (pp. 10–17). From a brief survey of the interplay of religion and politics in other
countries, the author concludes that the Nigerian experience of religious politics generating violence is not unique.

While these introductory discussions are stimulating and insightful, Chapters 1–9 are more informative than discursive. Historical overviews on Islam and Christianity set the background to the key issues in the Muslim-Christian violent clashes from the mid-1970s to the early 1990s, namely: colonialism/western civilization, education, law, missions and international involvement from Islamic and Christian groups. The specialist will find problems with some of the points here, such as the assertion that the nineteenth-century jihad in Hausaland ‘succeeded in securing a large number of converts’ (p. 46). It would have been nitpicking to point out the misspelling of the acronym NCNC (National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons) were it not linked to the argument that ‘astute politicians realized the force of religion in mobilizing people; when Nnamdi Azikiwe established the National Church of Nigeria and Cameroon, for instance, he did so not because he was himself religious, but in order to mobilize the faithful against the colonial administration’ (pp. 40–1; see also pp. 43, 53). Predictably, tracing the historical evolution of the Nigerian state leads to lamenting the many negative consequences of military rule. Heavily relying on government official reports on the violent religious conflicts, press reports and field interviews, Chapters 3–7 recount the major Muslim-Christian clashes, highlighting public controversies on the inclusion/exclusion of the Sharia in the Nigerian constitution, the secularity of the Nigerian state, Nigeria’s membership in the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and the radicalization and leadership of Christian and Muslim organizations. While generally informative, these chapters tend merely to present the conflicting claims by Muslims and Christians on the causes, sequences and outcomes of the increasing violence, without attempting to determine which claims are false, even if accurately representing the perceptions of the combatants.

Chapter 8 claims that contrary to the popular image of a united Muslim North, there are ‘profound divisions’ as well as ‘many kinds of factions, sects, movements and Sufi brotherhoods known as tariqa’ (p. 227). Breaking from the pattern of previous chapters, Chapter 8 does not give ‘the specifics of violent incidents’ among Muslims; instead it seeks ‘to explain generally why violence occurs between Muslims’ (p. 228). Chapter 9 on ‘hate literature and verbal violence’ reveals that in rehashing age-old doctrinal disputes, Nigerian Muslims and Christians often quote polemical publications from abroad, especially the testimonies of converts.

Chapter 10 and the epilog take up again the comparative discussion of religion and politics, rejecting a number of strategies and options, while offering alternatives for managing religious conflict.

The author states: ‘The issues that generate violence in other countries or that make religious violence difficult to resolve can be found in Nigeria, and would continue to be found there even in the event it improves its politics and its economy’ (p. 292). Further exploration of this point in light of the literature on ‘violence and the sacred’ (à la René Girard) would have added theoretical strength to the rich information presented in this volume. By providing a lot of empirical data, Violence in Nigeria invites further study theoretically to account for religious violence in Nigeria.

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MUHAMMAD SANI UMAR
TITLE: CASE STUDY OF A PEASANT COMMUNITY


Titles can be misleading. Many readers familiar with debates on Kenya's post-colonial development might assume that this book had in some sense grown out of the debate on the extent of capital accumulation in Kenya agriculture so famously and illuminatingly presented in the special issue of the Review of African Political Economy in 1981, under the title 'Kenya: The Agrarian Question'. In so far as Stephen Orvis's book is about the political economy of a peasant community in Kenya and that he views this community in comparison with the wider literature on social differentiation in Kenya, then it has a connection to this debate. But that is as far as it goes.

What Orvis has written is a competent little case study of the recent experience of a small peasant community in Kisii district. The location of this community is not identified, but it is referred to by the pseudonym Bomondo. It comprises some 100 families, whose histories are charted through three generations to give a sense of the socio-economic trajectory of the community. The study concentrates on the level of the household, and Orvis is principally concerned with an analysis of the ways in which households and the social structures around them have been modified from the colonial era to the present. He sees the shortage of household labour, especially women's labour, as the most critical constraint upon economic growth and the recent policies of the state as undermining the capacity of rural communities such as Bomondo to sustain economic growth. Hence, Orvis interprets his Kisii village as now being in a condition of 'rural crisis'.

The material presented to make these points regarding Bomondo falls in Chapters 3-6 and deals with a richly varied assortment of themes. There are interesting sections on bridewealth and marriage, on the significance of witchcraft and on the effectiveness of the self-help philosophy of 'harambee'. The chapter on class provides an illuminating study of the evolution of the Kisii land market and produces compelling evidence to demonstrate the emergence of what Orvis terms the 'peasant-worker' household. These households experience greater poverty than any other category. It is surprising to discover that poor households receive little assistance from the wider community, nor even from their relatives. The driving force of social differentiation in Kisii appears now (since the 1990s) to be primarily demographic, although it is not clear how this may relate to historical patterns. Although the importance of an historical perspective is asserted throughout the study, in practice this really only relates to the last fifty years at best and more often only the past two decades. For the most part, this somewhat close historical horizon is adequate, but in some aspects of the study (for example in the discussion of class formation) digging deeper, and utilizing the copious archival sources that are available for Kisii district, might have offered other insights.

In the final sections of the book Orvis aims to set the experience of social differentiation in Bomondo in the wider comparative frame of rural Kenya. This part of the study seems less satisfactory, partly no doubt because there is less of originality to be offered through such an exercise and partly also because the emphasis on social structures that characterizes the examination of Bomondo cannot be replicated for the comparative cases. The conclusions here are thus unsurprising, tending only to reinforce what we already know from other examples. Socio-economic trends in Kisii do not seem so different from the general pattern for the country as a whole. Similarly, it does appear that as differentiation has become more marked in Kisii long-standing political patrons have found it increasingly difficult to adapt, as in other parts of the country also.
This study will be of only limited value to most historians, although all those interested in the development process in eastern Africa will welcome it as another useful case study of socio-economic change at the household level.

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SHORTER NOTICES


This is a collection of papers from one of a number of conferences being held as part of a larger study of the diaspora from what is now Nigeria, sponsored by the UNESCO Slave Routes project and directed by Paul Lovejoy, Robin Law and Elisée Soumonni. It contains eight papers, all of them valuable contributions. Law’s paper is an analysis of a single source, the papers of Richard Rawlinson available in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. Carolyn Sorenson-Gilmour discusses sources for the period of abolition in nineteenth-century Badagry, and David Richardson presents the W. E. B. DuBois Institute database on slave-trade voyages. Patrick Manning has an excellent analysis of the strengths and limitations of simulation. The only flaw, and in fact the most consistent problem in his efforts at simulation, is his failure to devote adequate attention to mortality in conflict caused by the slave trade and in the movement of slaves to the coast. Only Larry Yarak’s well-crafted discussion of Dutch efforts to recruit soldiers for East India service goes beyond the question of sources, and he uses the question to discuss how historians can use such sources to enrich their picture of slavery and the slave trade within Africa.

The most valuable article is Elisée Soumonni’s paper on local sources because it directs itself to the essential question of articulating an African voice. Even this, however, leaves the slaves themselves in the background because the archaeological and oral data he discusses tell us more about slave-owners and traders than about the slaves. The last two papers also address the problem of finding a slave voice. Douglas Chambers discusses the kinds of data in the diaspora that can be used to recreate its history: slave names, plantation records, ex-slave narratives, court cases, folklore, artefacts, customs, etc. More than any other paper in this collection, it demonstrates what diaspora history can be in the hands of someone at home with sources on both sides of the Atlantic. Finally, Paul Lovejoy discusses the collection of a bibliographical archive of enslaved Africans. The notion is, as Lovejoy presents it, that ‘if enough bricks are assembled, historical structures can be built’ (p. 120).

University of Toronto

SHORTER NOTICES


This volume on the Arab Maghreb is the latest in the World Bibliographic Series, which also includes earlier volumes devoted to each of these six states or territories. In his preface, Pazzanita defines the area as ’comprising those countries and territories extending from the Senegal River Valley in south-west Mauritania
to the eastern Libyan and western Egyptian deserts’ (p. xiii); subsumed thus under the rubric of ‘Arab Maghreb’ are Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia and Western Sahara. The annotated bibliography deals primarily with English-language monographs and articles, over 500 in number, that approach the Maghreb as a whole or, in the very least, treat two or more North African territories. However, some works in French, Spanish or German dealing with the Maghreb comparatively or thematically have been included. Travel memoirs and guides containing particularly useful information on a single state, area, or sub-region and dictionaries with comprehensive bibliographies have also been considered. The volume is prefaced by a 13-page historical overview of the region and its scholarly literature; the introduction concludes with the formation of the Arab Maghreb Union [AMU] and lists major French-language conventions, agreements and other works on the union. Other prefatory material includes a two-page glossary of unfamiliar French or Arabic terms as well as institutional or organizational acronyms.

The bibliography proper contains 531 numbered entries, some with extensive analysis and discussion of the contents of the publication under consideration. Twenty-one chapters or sections organize the material, beginning with ‘The region and its people’ and concluding with ‘Dictionaries and bibliographies’. The five parts devoted to history, religion, politics, foreign relations and economy are, not surprisingly, the most extensive in terms of the number of listings under each; in addition there are shorter sections devoted to population, language, education, etc. Mention should be made of the chapter entitled ‘Women’, which represents an effort to incorporate some of the scholarly research on women into standard reference works. Of special interest to historians are the parts dealing with ‘Explorers’ and early travellers’ accounts’, ‘Travel memoirs and travel guides’, ‘Prehistory and archaeology’ and ‘History’, which runs from the Carthaginian era to the post-colonial period. Pazzanita’s bibliography ends with three indexes – authors, titles and subjects – and a map of the Arab Maghreb.

It should be noted that the subject index reveals some surprising lacunae; for example, there are no listings for ‘slavery’ or ‘migration’. And a number of history authors and titles are excluded by virtue of the overly rigid application of the comparative principle – works by John Ruedy, Susan G. Miller, Joëlle Bahloul as well as this reviewer’s 1994 monograph whose sub-title clearly indicates that it is devoted to both Algeria and Tunisia.