REVIEWS

IRONWORKING


Until recently, the historiography of African ironworking was conspicuously narrow in perspective. Most scholars viewed ironworking as an independent phenomenon unrelated to the cultural milieu in which it occurred. They were concerned almost exclusively with description of the technological and ritualistic processes that are involved in iron production. In this ‘cultureless’ paradigm, technological attributes of the west were used to measure the successes (if any) and failures of African ironworking. In this way, African iron production became a primitive expression of technological life that was seen to present a survival of European iron production as it would have been several thousand years ago. African technology was portrayed as derivative (from Europe or the Middle East), retarded, backward and otherwise lacking in innovation. Thus, the historical value of iron production in Africa became its usefulness in helping to explain the characteristics of ancient technological history in Europe. This has been a wrong paradigm, founded upon speculations and false assumptions, and measured against wrong standards (western, as opposed to African technological and cultural standards).

Schmidt and his colleagues in the two books under review challenge the status quo. They use a more holistic approach that takes into consideration the cultural context within which the technology existed. They try to deconstruct a false historical edifice built on untested and unproved ideas about ancient African iron technology and replace it with a paradigm that not only values Africa’s past but also relies on concrete data (archaeological, metallographic, historical, linguistic and ethnographic) to prove the superiority of African iron technology. In other words, they replace a view that denigrates African accomplishment with one that recuperates the positive attributes of innovation and invention with richly informed cultural meanings, leading to a more stable foundation for historical identity. African iron technology is shown to have also contributed to the western world, and probably more than it received from there.

Unlike the traditional paradigm that viewed technology in isolation, the new paradigm brings into discussion various other cultural traits. In the edited volume (1996), for example, Candice L. Goucher and Eugenia W. Herbert, using the Banjeli of West Africa as a case study, discuss the place of gender in such matters as division of labour, mode of inheritance and taboos. Randi Barndon presents the Fipa of south-western Tanzania, revealing the division of labour between genders as well as social and economic statuses associated with iron production. Presenting the case of the Barongo of north-western Tanzania, Peter Schmidt dissects the symbolism involved in ironworking. He shows how the Barongo participate simultaneously in a number of transformational domains: myth, ritual and
healing; and how all these relate to ironworking. Nicholas David with Ian Robertson and S. Terry Childs with William Dewey present two chapters on forging. Whereas David and Robertson discuss how culture influences socio-economic and technological adaptation in Muslim and Montagnard societies of the Mandara region of North Cameroon, Childs and Dewey excellently demonstrate how symbols applied by blacksmiths to their artefacts reflect the culture of the Shona of Zimbabwe and Luba of southern Zaire.

In *Iron Technology in East Africa*, Schmidt uses material remains recovered archaeologically, ethnographic inquires and experimentation (scientific testing and observation), metallographic data, comparative ethnoarchaeological data and environmental data, to demonstrate the complexity and sophistication of African ironworking among the Bahaya of western Victoria Nyanza. He then devotes two chapters to an analysis of symbolism, a focus of his vast interest. Through a cross-cultural and comparative approach, using the Pangwa of southern Tanzania, Tabwa of Democratic Republic of Congo, Chulu and Phoka of Malawi, Babungo of Cameroon, Bahaya of western Victoria Nyanza, Barongo of southern Victoria Nyanza and several other ironworking communities from East and Central Africa, Schmidt shows that it is possible to recognize both changes and significant continuities in the symbolism that conferred meaning to iron smelting over the past two millennia.

Both volumes demonstrate Schmidt’s career-long mission: ‘to deconstruct Western representations about African iron technology’ (1997, p. 4), representations that claimed that ‘African technological history lacked any achievement worthy of scientific interest’ (1996, p. 1). One technological innovation that Schmidt has repeatedly employed to support his argument that indigenous African ironworking achieved advancement long before western Europe is the pre-heating technique. According to him, this technique has been practised in western Victoria Nyanza (and other parts of sub-Saharan Africa) for over two millennia and it accounts for the best quality carbon steel obtained from this part of the continent. He argues in both these volumes (as he has always done) that the fact that black Africa applied pre-heating techniques long before they became common in Europe demonstrates that Africa has something to offer to the world and deserves attention. Evidently, some scholars have not readily accepted this idea, and several chapters are republications of debates that have arisen in regards to the pre-heating technique since Schmidt first published it in the 1970s.

Schmidt is firm in his conviction that archaeology is better equipped to restore Africa’s lost historical prestige than history, because the continent has a relatively limited time period of written history. The work of archaeologists is crucial for tracing the origins of iron technology, a task to which Pierre de Maret and G. Thiry have devoted a chapter. However, they admit that archaeologists alone cannot achieve the required result; they need to collaborate with other scientists including linguists and ethnographers.

In terms of evaluation, the two volumes are outstanding for several reasons. First, they both depart from the conventional historiography that has viewed iron technology in isolation, and advocate and employ a culture-based perspective. Second, founded upon rigorous research, the two books provide concrete evidence for the dexterity, complexity and variability that characterize African iron technology. By demonstrating these qualities the books reverse the traditional paradigm that has tended to view African iron technology as static and derivative. Third, the authors have employed data from multiple disciplines, including written documents, archaeology, ethnography, linguistics and metallography, thus strengthening their arguments. Fourth, the writing style is clear and straightforward; new concepts are clearly defined within the text and in the glossaries, making the books readable and understandable to both professionals and lay-
persons. These qualities, plus many others, make the two volumes timely and indispensable resources for professional and amateur students of African indigenous iron technology.

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BERTRAM B. MAPUNDA

THE SWAHILI COAST


Not since James Kirkman published Men and Monuments on the East African Coast in 1964 has an archaeologist presented an overview in book form of the archaeology of the Swahili coast. If only for this, The Rise and Fall of Swahili States would be a welcome addition to the literature. But Dr Kusimba of the Field Museum of Natural History engages most if not all of the major issues in the contemporary archaeology of the East African Coast, and the book is therefore a major contribution to the field.

The author sets the stage by discussing the Swahili coast, language, people and identity, simply but effectively, while avoiding a detailed discussion of the contentious and probably fruitless argument about exactly who the Swahili are. He introduces a discussion of the coast in western historiography by stating that ‘[a]rchaeology, as a means of describing the past is, inherently, a political act’. As examples, he cites a theory of external origins that saw major elements of Swahili culture as essentially a foreign import. James Kirkman, who described the coast as ‘colonial and comfortable’, and Neville Chittick were the principal proponents of this view. Kusimba contrasts this with a more recent appreciation of the indigenous origins of Swahili culture, advanced among others by Jim Allen, Mark Horton, Derek Nurse, Tom Spear and Richard Wilding. The author notes the complexity of Swahili origins, and concludes that the ‘Swahili civilization seems to have had its local origins, as well as its external influences’.

Until recently many works began discussions of Swahili origins in the late eighth or ninth century, which reflects the earliest levels of the major large sites on the coast, such as Pate, Manda, Shanga and Kilwa. This book provides an expanded chronology within which to understand Swahili origins. Kusimba discusses recent work by scholars such as Peter Schmidt, Felix Chami, George Abungu, Paul Sinclair and others that links Iron Age and other sites in the hinterland or along the coast with the earliest levels of the major coastal sites. This allows the author to propose an historical chronology: Period I, 100 B.C.–A.D. 300; Period II, 300–1000 (divided into Azanian and Zanjian phases, following Chami); Period III, 1000–1500 (the classical age); and Period IV, 1500–1950 (the colonial period – the 1950 date is unexplained). This research allows us to understand the possible indigenous roots of Swahili culture and casts serious doubts on the pure external origins theory.

Dr Kusimba provides an overview of the geography, resources and contemporary peoples of the coast, including useful tables summarizing some of this information. In regard to the earliest peoples in the area, he discusses the presence of foragers, pastoralists and later agriculturalists at the coast. The book covers the debate, perhaps unresolved, about the respective roles of pastoralists and agriculturalists in Swahili origins. The author documents the importance of ironworking and the production of carbon steel and cast iron in the Swahili
economy, based upon his own pioneering research. Citing analysis of burials from his excavations at Mtwapa, the author speculates that the physical type of the earliest agricultural settlers of the coast were Bantu speakers and farmers, an assertion that may be true but that nevertheless exceeds the evidence.

The author effectively discusses Swahili settlement patterns, the layout of settlements, the economy, interregional and international trade, the origins and role of Islam, and Swahili society including classes and elites. He describes the mji or town as the central element of Swahili society, and relates Swahili social structure and organization to the physical manifestations of the communities. He presents a theory of state formation, if I understand it correctly, based upon development from a lineage and kin-based society to one emphasizing corporate structures and capital formation. He sees elements of both network and corporate strategies in Swahili state formation.

Classical Swahili society began to dissolve with the appearance of the Portuguese on the coast in 1498, who, for about the next two centuries, visited all kinds of depredations, disruptions and humiliations upon the Swahili. Kusimba favors this as the explanation for the decline of the Swahili and abandonment of many sites beginning in the sixteenth century, as opposed to theories positing environmental degradation, drought and aggression by Oromo or Somali pastoralists. Mijikenda settlements behind the coast were a response to Portuguese pressure, and any inter-ethnic conflicts with the Oromo are explained by this competition for space. The arrival of the Omanis in the eighteenth century mainly substituted one foreign master for another, after Swahili society was already in considerable disarray. Somewhat puzzling to me is the final conclusion of the book, that following ‘the rash enthusiasms of colonial empire-building’... ‘Swahili culture was finished... It would be no more’. Obviously, it is still there, albeit much changed after five hundred years of colonial experience. The author concludes the book with a personal anecdote demonstrating that the Swahili have yet to achieve full acceptance as equal partners in contemporary East Africa.

The book succeeds in its goal to ‘help unravel the myths’ concerning the Swahili, and it provides a much-needed overview of the archaeology of the Swahili coast. It should be on the shelf of anyone interested in the history and archaeology of eastern Africa.

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THOMAS H. WILSON

SONGHAY HISTORY


One hundred years after the Arabic text of Ta’rikh al-Sudan by ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Sa‘di was edited and translated into French by O. Houdas, we have an English translation of this chronicle by John Hunwick. Ta’rikh al-Sudan is undoubtedly the most important internal Arabic source for the history of the western Sudan. The text was completed some time after 1665/1655–6, which is the last date mentioned in the chronicle.

Al-Sa‘di relied on a variety of sources: oral traditions for the early history of Ghana, Mali and Songhay as well as accounts on the Tuaregs and Fulani of Massina; he quoted Arabic sources, such as Ibn Battuta, the anonymous al-Hulal al-Mawshiyya and Ahmad Baba’s biographical dictionary.
The detailed and dated accounts of the political history of Songhay and of the scholarly traditions of Timbuktu, as presented by al-Sa’di for the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, could not have been written without a long tradition among the scholars of Timbuktu, who had kept written records of events. ‘Our forefathers’, al-Sa’di says in the introduction to his chronicle (p. 1), ‘would speak of the chiefs and kings of their lands, their lives and deaths, their conduct, their heroic exploits and other historical information and tales relating to them’. He goes on to complain that ‘in the following generation there was none who had any interest in this’.

Al-Sa’di, who was born in 1594, may be referring to the generation that experienced the Moroccan conquest and became dispirited. He therefore ‘sought the help of God in recording the stories and historical traditions that have been handed down about the kings of the Sudan…and the scholars of Timbuktu’. The records for the first half of the seventeenth century, during the lifetime of al-Sa’di, were first-hand information by the author himself. Ta’rikh al-Sudan, together with the near-contemporary Ta’rikh al-Fattash (written by three generations of the Ka’ti family), offer a fascinating account of the history of Songhay and Timbuktu, and of the interaction between the political and scholarly elites. It covers a period of over two centuries, from the mid-fifteenth to the mid-seventeenth centuries.

John Hunwick has chosen not to present al-Sa’di’s chronicle as a translated and annotated text only, but to integrate a translation of it as the major source in a book on Timbuktu and the Songhay empire, as suggested in the sub-title. He chooses to end the book, and the translation of Ta’rikh al-Sudan, in 1613, the year that marked the end of the resistance of Songhay to the Moroccan conquest. The rest of Ta’rikh al-Sudan, until the mid-seventeenth century, deals with the history of Timbuktu under the arma or the Pashalik. Hunwick may be right in suggesting that those last chapters of Ta’rikh al-Sudan should be brought together with a translation of the eighteenth century Tadhkirat al-Nisyan, a project that the present reviewer together with Michel Abitbol hope to undertake.

The other contemporary documents are, first, a new English translation of Leo Africanus’ Description of the Middle Niger; second, a translation of letters of the Sa’di rulers of Morocco relating to the Sahara and Sahel, taken from a collection of texts in Arabic edited by ‘Abdallah Ghanun in 1954; third, extracts related to the Moroccan conquest of Songhay, translated from Nuzhat al-hadi by the Moroccan historian al-Ifrani (died c. 1745); and fourth, a translation of a contemporary account of the conquest of Songhay by an anonymous Spaniard, who was resident in Marrakesh in 1591, published in the series of sources edited by De Castries. Thus, all the four additional sources present views from the north. Three of those sources are concerned with the Moroccan conquest of Songhay and its antecedents.

The book under review opens with the ‘translator’s introduction’, titled ‘Songhay – an interpretative essay’. In 43 pages, John Hunwick presents an overview of the history of Songhay and the askiyas’ relations with Timbuktu. This brief survey should be read together with Hunwick’s introduction to Shari’a in Songhay: The Replies of al-Maghili to the Questions of Ashiya al-hajj Muhammad (London, 1985), as well as with some thirty articles and notes by Hunwick published in periodicals and books. Most of these contributions are themselves textual studies with extensive argumentation. Because these articles are not easily accessible, perhaps they could be reprinted in a single volume.

This clear and accurate English translation of Ta’rikh al-Sudan is an eye-opener, even for those who read both the Arabic text and the French translation. Extensive notes to the text include variants of the different manuscripts, as well as comparisons with the text of Ta’rikh al-Fattash. Among the appendices, maps and diagrams, the most important is Appendix Four, a list of offices and office-holders
under the askiyas in alphabetical order. For the first time we have well researched definitions of the functions of the different office-holders. With this appendix, the text of Ta’rikh al-Sudan becomes more meaningful.

The translation of Ta’rikh al-Sudan is an important addition to the growing (albeit too slowly) number of Arabic sources in translation. A primary source on politics, society and religion in the West Africa over a period of two centuries is now open to all.

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NEHEMIA LEVTZION

DIOLA RELIGIOUS HISTORY


This book is an innovative study of Diola religion. The author demonstrates that the Diola have understood their changing macrocosm through their spirit shrines – without recourse to Islam or Christianity. Tracing the history of spirit shrines in pre-colonial Diola society, the book makes short shrift of the so far uncontested assumption that the Diola are not interested in their history, and do not know much about it.

The book focuses on the shrines of the Diola-Esulalu townships, located south of the Casamance River in south-western Senegal. The first of its seven chapters offers a solid introduction into the problems of the historical study of African traditional religions. The second chapter provides an introduction into Esulalu’s social and spiritual organization. Yet, what Baum presents as the longue durée of the structures of community life might also be read as an ‘ethnographic present’ in the past tense. Chapters 3 and 4 trace the origins of the Diola-Esulalu and their conquest of the Koonjaen, the alleged first inhabitants of the region. The author sketches how the subjected Koonjaen were integrated within the dominant Diola society, and how a syncretistic religious tradition emerged out of the fusion of these distinct ethnic groups. This analysis, however, is based on a problematic assumption that ‘ethnic groups’ have distinct ‘religious systems’.

Chapter 5 is the cornerstone of the book, dealing with the slave trade and religious change in eighteenth-century Esulalu. Some authors (Meillassoux, Rodney) have assumed that slave raiding was organized by aristocratic warrior groups operating in highly stratified societies, rather than in relatively egalitarian societies like that of the Diola. Yet Baum argues that the Diola, too, were implicated in the slave trade. In the absence of state control the people of Esulalu turned to their spirit shrines, whose prestige and power were seen as an effective means to control this growing economic activity (p. 113). The spirit shrines regulated which categories of people could legitimately be enslaved and sold in the trade. Only captives whose kin would not ransom them could be sold without spiritual sanction. Wooden slave-fetters were attached to shrines that took on the additional function of protecting the captives and those involved in their seizure (p. 118). The profits of ransom and sale of captives inevitably heightened differences in wealth between families in Esulalu. This increased stratification led to extensive initiatory sacrifices for access to the township council shrine. By the end of the eighteenth century, the authority of wealth rather than charisma or age proved the criterion of access to the shrine, where decisions about community welfare were made (p. 127). The wealthy elite replaced the most senior men as
representatives at the shrine. Thus, the slave trade initiated a process of class formation.

After this most intriguing chapter, two more chapters deal with the religious history of Esulalu in the era of French expansion. We learn how the Diola-Esulalu were increasingly inserted in the world economy. This process strengthened their links to the macrocosm while simultaneously reinforcing the influence of lesser spirits, thus refuting Horton’s theory on African traditional religion. Theoretically, this is the major contribution that the book makes. It demonstrates that a so-called African traditional religion was capable of providing the means to grasp transformations, and structure participation in them.

Yet one nagging question remains. Can one write a history of religion when written sources are hardly available? Baum collected almost all information on the pre-1800 era through interviews. Since they were not tape-recorded, these interviews are not available to the public. Basically, the reader has to trust the author for an accurate rendition of his oral sources. This is not unusual, but it becomes somewhat contentious in a study conducted among a people of whom all other researchers have said that they do not show much interest in their past. Even Diola genealogies often remain very shallow. Baum argues that the Diola do have a history, and that they do have ‘historians’. But the author does not sufficiently account for the contradictions in their utterances. Baum relegates the controversies to footnotes and presents a sometimes high-handed interpretation that is too neat, and in which there is no evidence of the contradictions among different informants. His oral testimonies were clearly shaped by the present, as all utterances are. Why, for instance, do we learn so much about the creation of shrines, and so little about their withering? Probably because the memory of a vanishing shrine has itself also disappeared. Why do we learn so little about women’s shrines in a society known for relative female autonomy? Perhaps because the majority of ‘historians’ were men? Can one rely exclusively on oral sources?

To put it summarily, Baum has done a tremendous job in collecting so much material. The result is an interesting history of an African religion. Shrines of the Slave Trade also provides a good discussion on the usefulness of oral traditions for the production of academic history. This book may be another test case in this debate.

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ESSAYS ON ANGOLA


Since the 1960s David Birmingham has been one of the most perceptive observers of the unfolding story of Portuguese-speaking Africa. His own pioneering work on the Mbundu kingdoms is still a classic and he has always approached Angola’s problems with a deep and subtle understanding of the country’s history. Generations of students have benefited enormously from his guidance in their infant researches, and from his tact and understanding as an examiner. In the concluding paragraph to the chapter entitled ‘Angola and the Church’ the reader almost feels he is eavesdropping on one of these postgraduate supervisions. It is very appropriate, therefore, that in the year in which he officially retires this collection of essays should appear to mark the climax of a distinguished career.
Birmingham has not just been among the leading scholars of Lusophone Africa, he has seen it as his personal vocation to make history accessible. His *Concise History of Portugal* and *Frontline Nationalism in Angola and Mozambique* are excellent examples of what has become almost a passion to synthesize, simplify and explain. Moreover they are written in a very distinctive, epigramatic style which enables him to make use of language to create lateral thinking, to fashion a single phrase that can create a new angle of vision on a well-worn theme. His description of the battle of Bussaco in 1810 is typical. This military episode from the Peninsular War, so often seen as one of the steps on Wellington's ascent to Mount Olympus, is described as the battle when 'the Portuguese army, with British assistance, delayed the second attempt by the French to capture Lisbon' – a line worth a whole volume of scholarly reinterpretation.

All this is to say that the essays collected in this book are all examples of the author’s unique skill in popularizing historical themes. All but one of the chapters is about Angola (so the title is a little misleading), and they are made up of lectures and book reviews as well as academic articles. David Birmingham has always been intensely aware of how contemporary events are unfolding, and the reader can follow his scholarly reaction to the wars of independence, the now somewhat fossilized debate over Lusotropicalism, the new dawn of socialist planning, the slide into anarchy, and the nightmare of ethnic massacre and civil war. Always there is an attempt to identify the historical themes underlying the turbulence of modern events. When the study of African trade was fashionable, he wrote ‘Early African Trade in Angola’; when the study of proto-nationalism preoccupied African scholars he reinterpreted the Imbangala and Jaga ‘in terms of local rebellion, or resistance to the growth of slave-trading’ (p. 48) rather than as invading hordes; his article on ‘The Coffee Barons of Cazengo’ drew attention to the early capital investment in plantations which preceded the establishment of firm colonial rule; more recent essays have focused on the role of the Protestant churches in solidifying the social and class divides of Angola and he has written attractively about the elites of Luanda and the problems facing young men in Angola in the post-independence period. Significantly the demonization of the Portuguese, which was the stock in trade of all writers during the wars of liberation, has given way to more sophisticated analyses of the social forces at work in both Angola’s history and its present.

All these essays are written with an overriding preoccupation to communicate and to present complicated stories in a way that the reader can appreciate and assimilate. In one instance this leads him into the experiment of using fiction – a sort of short story – to illustrate the changes experienced by the Angolan peasantry under colonial rule. However, if I were to choose the most exciting of all chapters, it would probably be ‘Angola Revisited’, which is a portrait of Angola in 1987. I also visited Luanda in that year and especially warm to this marvellous description of post-independence chaos and disintegration precariously held together by extraordinary survivals of colonial rule:

…obedience, subservience and resigned acceptance of the all-powerful written order with the red seal have become an ingrained way of life which survived the first war of liberation, the day of independence, the second war of liberation and 13 years of civil war (p. 164).

The reader of this collection will be taken on a nostalgic journey back through three decades of African historiography and through the turbulent times that Angola has faced since 1961. The essays will be archetypal ‘supplementary reading’. One can almost hear future generations of history professors telling their students – ‘read Miller, Hilton, Heimer and Péllissier, oh, and see what David
Birmingham has to say on the subject’. As glosses on both Angolan history and the Angolan scene over he last thirty years they are little classics, intelligent, witty, informed and always enlightening.

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THE TRANSATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE


This is by no means the first work of synthesis on the Atlantic slave trade, but it is the first to be published for some time, and thus the first to be in a position to take account of the mass of detailed research that has appeared during the last twenty-odd years. In particular, Klein draws extensively upon the recently completed database of the Atlantic slave trade (also published by Cambridge University Press), of which he was co-editor with David Eltis, Stephen Behrendt and David Richardson. After an introductory chapter surveying the role of ‘slavery in western development’ generally, which serves usefully to clarify the historical specificity of the transatlantic trade in comparison to earlier slave systems, the book proceeds through a series of chapters dealing with different aspects of the slave trade, divided up basically by geography: the development of demand in the Americas and of supply from Africa (both chapters emphasizing the shifting location of the main foci of the trade through time); the European and African dimensions of its organization; the Middle Passage; and the ‘social and cultural impact’ of the trade in America, meaning the nature of the slave societies which it established.

This intended arrangement, however, sometimes breaks down in detail, with some material turning up in unexpected places. For example, the mortality of slaves within Africa, in transit to the coast, is discussed not in connection with the African organization of the trade, but as a sort of side-comment on the significance of mortality in the Middle Passage; and the sex and age composition of transported slaves is analysed not as a feature of the operation of the trade from either the European or the African perspective, but as a preliminary to the consideration of slave societies in the Americas. Beyond this, there is some repetition of material among different chapters; conceivably, more rigorous copy-editing might have tightened up the organization, but more charitably perhaps these infelicities reflect intractable problems of presentation inherent in the subject. A final chapter deals with the ending of the slave trade in the nineteenth century, and a substantial bibliographical essay is included as an appendix.

This book explicitly sets out to challenge traditional perceptions, which it rightly claims have largely persisted in non-specialist academic as well as popular circles, despite published research that has refuted them: for example, the alleged cheapness of slaves on the African coast, the consequent willingness of slave-traders to accept high mortality of slaves in the transatlantic crossing, supposedly astronomical rates of profit in the face of this wastage in transit, and exaggerated claims for the contribution of these profits to the economic development of Europe, including in particular the origins of industrialization in Britain. Klein invokes ‘rationality’ as a necessary antidote to the politicized and emotional discourse that has commonly characterized discussion of the subject, especially in North America (p. xxvii).

‘Rationality’ seems in practice implicitly to be equated with quantitative measurement; at least, more extensive attention is given to those aspects of the
subject most amenable to a quantitative approach, including some which may appear to many readers to be of relatively marginal interest (such as ship tonnage, and crew-to-tonnage ratios) as well as others that are more uncontroversially of central importance (such as slave mortality). Overall, the effect is arguably to de-emphasize the violence that characterized the trade through all its phases, from the initial enslavement of its victims in the African interior, through the Middle Passage and into the experience of slavery in the Americas. This is not to say that the reality of this violence is denied, since on the contrary it is recurrently explicitly asserted and indeed emphasized, but only that by comparison with other aspects of the trade it attracts relatively brief and generalized comment.

Another by-product of this approach is effectively to de-centre the voices of the enslaved and transported Africans themselves. Although the autobiography of Olaudah Equiano is cited, it may be thought that much more use might have been made of this sort of material, for all the difficult problems of authenticity and representativity that it poses. These observations, it should be stressed, are offered more as a characterization than as a criticism of the book; the fact that a very different sort of book might have been written on this subject does not mean that the one that Klein has written is not, within its own terms, a very good book indeed. It offers a judicious and up-to-date survey of the current state of research, and discusses the key controversies in a manner that is balanced without being inconclusive (as far as the evidence allows), and clearly distinguishes between what is known with reasonable confidence, what is open to rational disagreement, and what can only be a matter for speculation.

As a non-Africanist, Klein’s treatment of the African aspects of the trade warrants especial commendation in this journal. He has read and assimilated the relevant literature, on the basis of which he is able to offer an extended analysis of the organization of the supply of slaves for sale at the coast, with emphasis upon the strength of the position of African political authorities and merchants in dealing with European purchasers, and their consequent ability largely to dictate the conditions of trade. The economic and demographic effects of the slave trade upon African societies are discussed more briefly, but sensibly. The difficulty of differentiating the impact of the transatlantic slave trade specifically, given the simultaneous (and indeed prior) existence of both an alternative export trade to the Islamic world and an internal market for slaves within Africa, is acknowledged, although there is no extended discussion of these other trades. (The claim in the book’s ‘blurb’ that it covers ‘the West and East African experiences’, it should be noted, is accurate only to the extent that it deals with European slaving on the East African coast.)

If there is a criticism to be made of Klein’s treatment of the African dimension of the trade it is perhaps a tendency to generalize from specific cases with insufficient sensitivity to variations in conditions from place to place on the African coast. For example, he stresses the role of strong African states such as Dahomey in providing a framework of order for the conduct of trade, including the policing of credit (pp. 104–5). This is fair enough in itself, but takes no account of those coastal entrepots where state structures were weaker, or even effectively absent, and traders had therefore to resort to private-order arrangements; there is no reference to the taking of human ‘pawns’ by European traders as security for credit advances to their African suppliers, as was practised for example in Old Calabar and Cameroon. It is also asserted that, at least from mid-fifteenth century, the direct seizure of persons as slaves by Europeans was abandoned, and ‘all’ slaves were thereafter purchased from African suppliers (p. 103). But while it is incontestable that the overwhelming majority of slaves were indeed purchased rather than seized, this obscures the fact that throughout the history of the trade there were recurrent instances of Europeans irregularly seizing and enslaving free
Africans, even though this practice was regarded as illegal by the generality of European traders as well as by Africans, and regularly gave rise to serious disputes. But anyone with experience of the difficulties involved in summarizing and synthesizing a mass of discrepant detailed data is likely to be indulgent to the author on this score.

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ROBIN LAW

AFRICAN MUSLIM DIASPORAS


There are several good surveys of African history appropriate for undergraduate teaching, but relatively few texts for West Africa, and fewer still for Islamic West Africa. And these few are often out of date or seriously flawed. For these reasons, the appearance of Dr Sylviane A. Diouf’s Servants of Allah, a general examination of Muslim Africans enslaved in the Americas, is welcome. Such a text might complement Philip Curtin’s Africa Remembered, a well annotated collection of primary sources for pre-colonial West Africa, drawn mainly from the narratives of men sold into the Atlantic slave trade, some of whom were Muslims. Since Africa Remembered generally does not include the portions of these slave narratives that describe life in the Americas, an additional text is required in order to address the American side of the slaves’ experiences, and effectively link the two continents. So it is unfortunate that while Diouf’s book is quite readable and full of interesting information, it also has several shortcomings that detract from its potential usefulness as an undergraduate text. These shortcomings mainly arise from Diouf’s attempt to cover such a vast topic, including all of the Americas and Muslim West Africa, for the entire duration of the Atlantic slave trade. Such a broad scope might lead even the most careful historian to a certain superficiality of analysis, and that may be why established scholars often shy away from writing general histories.

The presence of Muslim Africans in the Americas is an important historical phenomenon that merits serious scholarly examination, and Diouf deserves credit for drawing attention to this neglected subject. Careful study of enslaved Muslims’ stories could eventually reveal much about Islam in Africa; the differences and similarities of African and Euro-American forms of slavery; and the role of Islam as a cultural and political tool of resistance. Related scholarship might also discover the cultural legacy of Muslim Africans in the contemporary Americas. And, of course, these stories are valuable in their own right, as they reveal the unique qualities of the Muslim experience of the cruelties of American slave systems.

Diouf’s thesis is that Muslims constituted a significant portion of the African slaves in the Americas, and that they generally retained their faith. This faith, in turn, dramatically shaped their experience of slavery. This thesis, in its broad outlines, is basically accurate, though its sub-elements are problematic. For instance, Diouf argues that the enslaved Muslims were disproportionately drawn from elite families, and therefore had a high rate of literacy and commitment to their faith. She states, on the basis of very little evidence, that eighteenth-century West African Muslims had a higher literacy rate than did Europeans in the Americas (pp. 6–8, 107–8). Despite this assertion, she also argues that the faith of the African Muslims died with them by the twentieth century, and that only remnants of Islamic culture may still be found in the Americas. She persuasively describes the twentieth-century movements started by the Noble Drew Ali and
Farad Mohammed as unorthodox and unconnected to enslaved African Muslims by ancestry or intellectual heritage (p. 207). The problem with these arguments is that they are profoundly contradictory and require considerable care in the reconciling, which Diouf does not provide. If African Muslims were a substantial proportion of the Atlantic slaves, and if they possessed high rates of literacy and piety, why did African Islam disappear in the Americas by the twentieth century?

Diouf explains the inability of African Muslims to transmit their religion to their progeny as the result of the structure and hardships of American slavery. This explanation has some merit, but Diouf devotes only five pages to it (pp. 179–84). She begins reasonably enough by asserting that African women were scarce, and Muslim women more so; thus many Muslim men did not produce children. While the male to female ratio was more balanced among American-born slaves, Diouf maintains that slaves born in Africa generally did not intermarry with those born in the Americas. When Muslim slaves did have families, it was often with non-Muslim women, which rendered transmission of Islam to the children quite difficult. Yet, according to Diouf, even Muslim couples found it difficult to rear Muslim children because of high mortality rates, the children’s desire to conform with the non-Muslim majority of slaves and the difficulty of learning Arabic under the conditions of slavery. In Diouf’s view, the alternative, learning the Quran orally, was not an option, as Islam was a ‘written religion’. She states that oral transmission ‘works for Christians because images, icons, statues, wood carvings, stained glass and wall paintings act as support and explanation. They are the illiterates’ books. But iconography does not exist in Islam’ (p. 182). This argument is unsatisfactory because it does not recognize that orality has always been an important component of Islam, and that West Africans, especially the Muslim Mande, have long produced a brilliant oral literature of poetry and song. While this poetic tradition apparently predated Islam, in Arabia as well as West Africa, it was quickly turned to Islamic purposes. One common genre of West African Islamic scholarship was the versification of legal treatises, a process by which the main principles were summarized in rhymed poetry and memorized by students.

Similar flaws appear in Diouf’s brief discussion of African slavery, in which she implies that African slavery was an extremely benign institution. This assertion is sufficiently problematic, but she also makes it without any reference to the history of the institution in Africa or how it changed over time, or the economic or cultural factors that shaped it into such a benign institution. Nor does she refer to any of the major works that have appeared in the rich scholarly debate on this issue over the past thirty years. This omission is not unusual, as Diouf often makes both specific assertions and broad generalizations without reference to place or time, the source of her evidence, or the relevant scholarly literature. For example, she asserts that at some unspecified point during the Atlantic slave trade the Fulbé regularly translated the Quran into Pulaar (p. 25). Such a translation would be a wonderful historical find, but none of the senior scholars who I know has heard of such a text, and Diouf provides no citation to lead one to her source. Diouf also consistently applies evidence far beyond the context in which it is valid. For example she asserts, without citing evidence, that West African Muslims who were accomplished in Quranic exegesis wore white turbans, and that descendants of the Prophet wore white and green (p. 76). This may have been true in some part of West Africa at a particular time, but it was definitely not true of all West African Muslims.

Diouf also repeatedly implies that non-Muslim Africans were disproportionately responsible for slave raiding in West Africa, and that Muslim ‘cleric-warriors’ were primarily engaged in defending themselves against ‘pagan’ raiders, such as the Asante ‘fetishists’ (pp. 20, 30–1). Diouf’s language suggests her bias, as she regularly refers to non-Muslim African religions as ‘cults’ (pp. 183–90). Although
she at one point admits that Muslims sometimes enslaved other Muslims (p. 12), her subsequent statements suggest that this was rare. She states that Muslim warriors ‘knew that they must not be the aggressors’, indeed she suggests that Muslims regularly defended non-Muslims from enslavement by other non-Muslims (p. 30). Statements such as these are difficult to explain. Diouf seems to view the Saharan and trans-Saharan slave trade, which Muslims dominated, as insignificant or not relevant to her analysis of West African slavery. She devotes a single sentence to Saharan trade of all kinds, and then only to suggest that it was declining in the late seventeenth century. This issue has received insufficient study, but recent scholarship by James Webb and Ralph Austen contradicts Diouf’s position. In any case, a survey of this history would reveal that West African Muslims played a large role in a vast Saharan slave trade, which began at least 500 years before its Atlantic counterpart, and was rationalized on the basis of Islam. What is more, slavery was an important institution in Islamic West Africa at least as early as the sixteenth century, the point at which the indigenous documentary record becomes substantial.

A careful examination of slavery in Islamic West Africa would suggest how Islam affected the Muslim slave’s experience in the Americas, but Diouf does not provide this. In an effort to draw a quick, stark comparison with American slavery, she suggests that West African Muslims did not forcibly convert their slaves, and that conversion led to emancipation. While this was sometimes the case, it often was not. She also implies that Muslims in the Americas were shocked by ‘the debauchery of Christian men who sexually exploited powerless women’ (p. 96). Muslims were no doubt shocked by many of the horrors of American slavery, but the sexual exploitation of female slaves was probably not one of them. Christianity formally defined the sexual exploiters of slave women as sinners, but Islam provided male slaveholders complete sexual access to female slaves. Evidence from the late nineteenth century strongly suggests that slave women far outnumbered male slaves in Islamic West Africa, and that a substantial proportion of those women was exploited as concubines. However, that exploitation was much too complicated to be glossed as mere debauchery.

Diouf’s ahistorical view of West Africa leads her to sympathize consistently with the aggressors in wars between Muslims. In the case of Usman dan Fodio’s ‘jihad’ against Yunfa and the Hausa city-states, she so unreservedly takes the ‘jihadist’ side that she defines the Hausa as non-Muslim. In Diouf’s words, the jihad ‘pitted the army of Yunfa, made up of one hundred thousand foot soldiers and a ten-thousand-man cavalry, against the few thousand followers of dan Fodio. Vastly outnumbered and underequipped, the Muslims were inspired by their faith, which made them accomplish heroic deeds’ (p. 32). This facile interpretation of dan Fodio’s war is at least twenty years out of date. It also contradicts Diouf’s later assertion that 30 to 40 per cent of the enslaved West Africans were Muslims (p. 48). If the early nineteenth-century Hausa were not ‘real’ Muslims because they mixed Islamic and pre-Islamic religious practices, then she would have to reduce dramatically her estimate of the proportion of Muslims in West Africa and the Americas.

Diouf’s inattention to the history of the trans-Saharan slave trade leads her into additional errors. She states that ‘For obvious reasons, among West African Muslims color and slavery did not have any linkage’, and later she broadens this claim, stating that ‘In Africa, a social stigma was attached to the condition of slave but not an ethnic or racial one’ (pp. 14–15). Ironically, she cites Ahmad Baba, the Timbuktu scholar who made a famous critique of racially-motivated enslavement of West African Muslims in the early seventeenth century. She inexplicably takes his criticism of enslavement based on race as evidence that it did not exist. In fact, it did exist and was quite significant by the late sixteenth century.
The association of race and slavery in West Africa contributed to the tendency of elite West African Muslim families to define themselves as genealogically Arab, and hence ‘white’. Arab descent, or better, descent from the Prophet Muhammad, has been prestigious in Muslim societies since the beginning of Islam. But in West Africa, claims to status through noble Arab descent also offered a modicum of protection against potential enslavement. Diouf’s unfamiliarity with this historical phenomenon leads her to interpret erroneously Euro-American descriptions of some African Muslims as ‘Arabs’. She attributes these descriptions exclusively to the racist imaginations of ‘whites’ (p. 98), but they are more complicated and perplexing than that. As scholars of West Africa know, prominent Muslim families among the Fulbé, Mandé, Hausa, and others have long made claims to noble Arab descent. Fulbé claims go back at least as far as the early nineteenth century, which predates the Euro-American descriptions of Fulbé slaves that Diouf cites. These claims were recorded by figures such as Abdallah ibn Muhammad, the brother of Usman dan Fodio, upon whom Diouf heaps great praise.

If the Euro-American belief that the Fulbé had Arab ancestors could only be a product of white racism, then what of Fulbé who made these claims? The evidence suggests an awkward conclusion – that Euro-American slaveholders who professed Christianity bore more than a passing resemblance to their African Muslim counterparts. Such a conclusion would not diminish the culpability of Europeans who participated in Atlantic slave systems, but it would render historical West Africans more human, if somewhat less heroic.

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TIMOTHY CLEAVELAND

ISLAM IN COLONIAL FRENCH WEST AFRICA


Plutôt que de s’interroger sur la cohérence de la politique musulmane coloniale, les chercheurs rassemblés ici ont préféré adopter un point de vue ‘par le bas’ et s’interrogent sur l’attitude des musulmans qui basculent de l’hostilité à l’égard des autorités coloniales à l’‘association’ et ce à travers leurs biographies. Défilent tout d’abord celles des fondateurs ou des personnages centraux de confréries comme Shaikh Sa’d Bu (Ould Abdallah) pour la Fadeliiyya, Al-Hajj Malik Sy (Bousbina) pour la ‘Tijaniyya de Tivaouane (Sénégal), tiraillés entre le jihad/hijra et la ‘réserve’ ou taqiya, la soumission à l’ordre colonial réinterprétée en terme de résistance/collaboration. Vient l’ère contrastée des notables ou politiciens comme le qadi de Boghé (vallée du Sénégal) Mukhtar Saxo (Sall), le Chérif de Kankan Sheikh Mouhammad (Kaba), al-Hajj Ibrahim Niasse de Kaolack (Ousmane Kane), ou Seydou Nourou Tall, le ‘Grand marabout de l’AOF’ qui joua un rôle important
dans la définition des séditieux, les disciples de Shaykh Hamallah (Garcia). À la veille des indépendances et autour de ces dernières, apparaissent les réformistes comme Al-Hajj Mahmoud Ba Diowol (le regretté Moustapha Kane) ou Cheikh Touré (Gomez-Perez) qui tout en luttant contre la puissance des confréries, appartenaient au même espace mauritano-sénégalais.

L’ouvrage décline trois paradoxes qui coïncident grossièrement à des transitions d’une période à l’autre. Tout d’abord l’expansion de l’islam en Afrique de l’ouest a connu son apogée non durant la période des jihad au dix-neuvième siècle, mais postérieurement, durant l’oppression (zulm) coloniale. La critique doctrinale du jihad a été rarement menée sinon par Shaykh Sa’d Buh, qui défend l’idée que la guerre sainte entraîne inévitablement la guerre civile (fitna) entre musulmans (Dedoud Ould Abdallah). C’est plutôt par le retrait et le refuge à La Mecque ou hijra que s’exprime le plus clairement l’opposition à la colonisation (Wuld al-Bara). Il semble en effet que le travail d’accommodation se soit effectué moins doctrinalement qu’en certains lieux ou institutions qui ont joué le rôle d’opérateurs de transformations comme la ville de Saint-Louis (Robinson) ou l’instauration de tribunaux musulmans (Stewart, Sall). L’épanouissement de l’islam est particulièrement remarquable au sein de ce que Murray Last qualifie de ‘califat colonial’ à propos du Nigeria du Nord.

Mais comme l’indiquent les deux éditeurs de ce livre, Triaud et Robinson, la principale réponse à la colonisation ne fut pas d’ordre directement politique puisque ce fut le charisme ou baraka qui en constituait le socle au sein des confréries ou tariqa musulmanes et ce jusque’en en 1945 où ce fut la ‘politicité’, la siyasa qui prit le relais, sans l’abolir pour autant. Second paradoxe car les catégories qui furent forgées autour de la première guerre sous le nom ‘d’islam noir’ contribuèrent à en dévaloriser les traits constitutifs : anthropolatrie, culte des saints.

Or un des traits principaux que partagent les confréries dans toute l’Afrique de l’ouest c’est l’entremêllement des allégeances aux groupes de parenté, la généalogie ou nasab et le ‘lien religieux’ ou talmadha, la relation maître-disciple qu’analyse Ould Cheikh à propos du grand ouvrage du mauritanien Harun Wuld al-Shaikh Sidia.

Cette double trame de l’islam ouest africain – liens généalogiques et relations maître-disciple – explique ce second paradoxe. Durant la première moitié du siècle, la ‘pacification coloniale’ permit un affranchissement du charisme à l’égard des frontières nationales ou impériales. Le meilleur exemple est le redéploiement de la Tijaniyya opéré par Ibrahim Niasse à partir de Kaolack (Sénégal), de la Mauritanie au Nord du Cameroun et du Tchad, en passant par le Ghana (Ousmane Kane). Ce caractère transnational n’est pas spécifique à la période coloniale comme l’illustre le cas d’Al-Hajj Seydou Nourou Tall qui a parcouru l’AOF en tout sens (Garcia) puisqu’il caractérise également les réformes et les mouvements inspirés par le Moyen Orient comme dans celui d’A-Hajj Mahmoud Ba Diowol (M. Kane).

La confrérie Tijaniyya illustre le second trait issu de l’entremêlement des liens religieux et des liens généalogiques, à savoir le factionnalisme qui la morcela en multiples segments. C’est ainsi qu’à Segou (Mali) s’opposent deux familles maraboutiques, les Sosso et les Haidara : ces derniers étant liés par mariage aux caam ennemis des Tall descendants d’Al-Hajj Oumar, se rallieront au mouvement d’Ibrahim Niasse (Manley). Le meilleur exemple de ce type de dissidence est représentée par le mouvement Hamalliste qui fait jouer toute une série de coupures politiques, tribales, confréries dès la préhistoire du mouvement à Nioro au Mali (Hamès). Il aurait fallu poursuivre ce type d’analyse car la principale critique que l’on peut formuler à l’encontre de l’ouvrage concerne l’absence de dimension panoptique mettant en parallèle les biographies sous forme de tableau prosopographique à l’échelle transnationale.
Le troisième paradoxe que révèle cet ouvrage concerne quelques rapports en miroirs entre islam et christianisme. Ainsi sur le terrain du prosélytisme, les Pères Blancs de l’actuel Burkina s’inspirèrent des pratiques musulmanes (Kouandé). Mais c’est évidemment sur le terrain de l’enseignement que s’opère l’identification ou la rivalité entre islam et christianisme, avec son cortège de ‘malentendus culturels’ comme en témoigne l’action des réformistes de l’Union culturelle musulmane du sénégalais Cheikh Touré à la veille des indépendances (Gomez-Pérez).

Nul n’illustre mieux cette convergence et ces ironies de l’histoire que le parallèle effectué par Louis Brenner des biographies de deux personnalités musulmanes maliennes, Amadou Hampâté Bâ et Saada Oumar Touré. Touré fut à l’initiative du mouvement des médersas qui visait à ‘moderniser’ l’enseignement coranique et Hampâté Bâ se fit le chantre de la tradition peule.

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LUSOPHONE AFRICANIST SCHOLARSHIP


In this handsomely produced volume, the director of the most active Portuguese historical research centre on the history of the Lusophone world1 has collected nearly twenty years of her own careful research into the interaction of Portuguese and Africans along the active commercial paths of nineteenth-century Angola. Dr Madeira Santos has been one of the key figures in the proliferating historical study of Africa in Lusophone countries since 1974, organizing three major international conferences,2 facilitating national research and publication in Mozambique, Angola,3 Cabo Verde, Guiné, and São Tomé/Príncipe, maintaining close relations with the growing scholarly community of Africanists in Brazil, and producing many volumes of documents and interpretation – as well as the journal Studia – through the Lisbon centre she directs. It is a hallmark of her leadership that all of this scholarship is now integrated productively into the otherwise dominant English- and French-language scholarship on the continent. Only veterans of the ideological insularity of the declining years of the Estado Novo and of Portuguese

1 Several centres of African studies have appeared in recent years, and two are prominent: Centro de Estudos Africanos (Universidade do Porto, director António Custódio Gonçalves) and its journal Africana studia (Revista internacional de estudos africanos); and the Núcleo de Estudos Sobre África (NES) (Universidade de Évora).


colonial rule, and witnesses to the challenges of scholarship of any sort in war-torn countries like Angola, can fully appreciate the indefatigable creativity and courage that many – in addition to Santos – have put into the making of the current lively and interesting state of Portuguese-language historical research on Africa, not least the nascent national historiographies.

All the more the pity, then, that so few Anglophone or Francophone scholars follow the fine work on which the small coterie of foreign participants in exploring the history of Portuguese-speaking Africa is privileged to draw. Santos has built the studies published here around the voluminous, previously unpublished diaries of the most famous Portuguese commercial broker in nineteenth-century Angola, António Francisco Ferreira da Silva Porto, whose career as a sertanejo spanned a half century from 1840 until his spectacular suicide in 1890. Silva Porto astutely facilitated and thoroughly chronicled the burst of African commercial enterprise in central Africa from the 1840s through the 1860s, when great caravans carrying wax, and then ivory and rubber, replaced violence and slaving along the caminhos of Santos’ title – the trails, some of them veritable highways – that linked African producers, through their political authorities, to the credit and commodities of the world capitalist economy. She reads the Silva Porto diaries, supported by the large number of other Portuguese-language sources for the era, with an astute eye for the strategies of the African participants, in what she shows was not so much a confrontation of cultures as an intimate, balanced commercial collaboration. She has a refined sense for the dramatic changes, on both sides, that marked the era, but balances those with a stimulating sense for eighteenth-century precedents on which both Africans and Portuguese drew and the continuation of some of these into the formative years of colonial rule. Images of ‘traditional’ Africa lingering in the Portuguese-speaking world will find no support here, and Santos’ appreciation of the intensely progressive strategies in Portugal challenges lusophobic tendencies in the ‘third world’ of English-language scholarship to dismiss Portuguese colonialism as anachronistic.

Of the ten essays in the book, six have been published elsewhere (the earliest in 1981), three are conference presentations from the early 1990s appearing here for the first time, and one seems written to conclude the set, by setting the earlier arguments in contemporary academic concerns with knowledge and space. Although the essays contain a certain amount of overlapping material, as must be the case with thoughts developed over so long a period of time and centring consistently on the practice of meshing African production with Portuguese commercial capitalism, the emphases range widely – from the vitality of African agriculture and artisanry developed to support growing trade, to the conceptual challenges of integrating individual enterprise into the African collective ethos, the Portuguese politics of strategic exploration and scientific inquiry in central Africa, the conflict between metropolitan government tendencies to pull back from territorial commitments as commercial competition between Zanzibar-based Swahili, Cape-based English and Dutch, and Angola-based traders sucked governments into their growing conflicts in the 1870s, and the Angolan Portuguese as well as African experiences of the territorial spheres delineated at the Congress of Berlin in 1884–5.

By integrating her sympathetic and insightful respect for the participants on all sides, Madeira Santos delineates fascinating incremental steps in the confrontations with modernity on both sides. The practical knowledge of the generation of independent Luso-African traders in Angola’s hinterland – which she dates from

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4 Which she edited, in part, as Viagens e apontamentos de um portuguense am A África (Diário de a. F. da Silva Porto) (Coimbra, 1981) (reviewed in this journal, 32 (1991), 152–3, anticipating the present volume with relish).
the 1830s through the 1870s, with Silva Porto as the revealing exemplar – documents the gradual intensification of trade throughout the continent that culminated in conflict and colonial conquest. Sources elsewhere in Africa nearly all represent only the passing impressions of outsiders, observing in ‘scientific’ terms that Madeira Santos neatly contrasts with the pragmatic, lived experience of the Portuguese sources she uses. With them she goes well beyond the abstractions that historians dependent on English and French ‘explorers’ often have difficulty transcending. The result is a fascinatingly historical reconstruction of the central African experience of a continent-wide process too often, otherwise, collapsed into typological contrasts.

The volume itself has been produced at the standard of elegance that has characterized a satisfying proportion of the recent, subsidized publication on Africa in Portugal, a polish all but absent from the products of American, British and French publishers. More than a hundred excellent reproductions of photographs from the era, drawings and designs, and maps of various provenances follow the essay. The literature on which Santos draws – the full range of Portuguese authors, supported by selected English- and French-language ethnography – is indicated both in footnotes and in bibliographies. The index is extensive and useful, if not as exhaustive as it might have been. Santos, in this volume and through her sponsorship of so much other recent work, is bringing both the parts of Africa illuminated by Portuguese sources and Portuguese scholarship on Africa to a sophistication that merits greater attention than the prevailing linguistic competences of the international community of Africanists are likely to support. Let this appreciation of her work stand as an invitation to my English-writing colleagues in the field to bring more of this scholarship to the attention of the review editors of the journals in African history, and to use its insights to enrich the historiography of the field as a whole.

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JOSEPH C. MILLER

LABOUR HISTORY OF MAURITIUS


This book is based on Richard Allen’s PhD thesis and subsequent articles published in Itinerario and Slavery and Abolition. Those interested in late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Mauritius will already be familiar with his work and pleased to see it brought together in a single volume that will be indispensable for students of Mauritian history.

First, the book breaks the existing barrier in Mauritian historiography between ‘historians of slavery’ and ‘historians of indentured labour’. Second, few historians have incorporated economic analyses into post-emancipation Mauritian history. Those examining the history of ex-slaves have focused on their ‘marginalization’, while historians of indentured labour have focused on the conditions of labourers (with the exception, of course, of M. Carter’s work). Richard Allen has not only dared cross those boundaries but fused the histories of both groups in one all-encompassing study of the plantation and post-plantation experience. The idea of continuities in systems of ‘unfree labour’ has not yet taken hold in Mauritian historiography, so perhaps this book will encourage young historians to adopt a less ethnocentric approach, and to view post-emancipation Mauritius as a whole rather than as a segmented and compartmentalized society in which ex-slaves and
indentured labourers seem to lead totally separate lives. Despite two conferences in Mauritius relating to post-emancipation Mauritius in 1999, this ‘conceptual’ barrier has not yet been overcome.

In a lengthy introduction, Allen explains some of the weaknesses of Mauritian historiography, many of which are now being addressed by a new breed of young historians trained at the University of Mauritius. Part One is devoted to slave marooning and the desertion of indentured labourers from the sugar estates. Allen places ‘marronage’ in a more analytical framework than has formerly been the case. He considers both its impact on the economy (75 per cent or more maroon slaves were ‘directly involved in productive enterprises’ [p. 44]) and compares it with other maroon societies. Similarities are found in laws controlling the post-emancipation mobility of labourers; desertion among Indian immigrants reached 12–15 per cent a year, the same level reached by maroon slaves in the 1820s (at the height of sugar expansion).

Part Two is devoted to the economic development of three groups that emerged out of slave and indentured society: the free people of colour, the ex-slaves and the ex-indentured. The revolutionary period 1790–1803, one of the most interesting as far as the activities of the free population is concerned, is for some reason not covered. Allen focuses primarily on the issue of land-ownership, mirroring the concerns of current historiography in Mauritius. Many studies of ‘marginalization’ relegate ex-slaves to an unimportant role, although Allen’s findings reveal the extent and desire of ex-slaves to own land.

Allen also explores the role played by domestic capital in the process of capital formation, which is particularly pertinent for Mauritius, where the nineteenth-century sugar industry was almost entirely financed from local sources. However, the role of Indian merchant capital has not yet been adequately researched, and it is a pity that Allen did not choose to dwell on this.

This book appears at an appropriate moment for Mauritius: Mauritian society is today in the process of re-examining and questioning its socio-economic-racial hierarchy, which also characterized late nineteenth-century society. Pressure on land is increasing, land rights are being contested, the number of squatters is growing and accusations against sugar estates, speculators and others who appropriated the land of illiterate small land-owners are multiplying. More and more, people are turning to studies of the nineteenth century to understand the contemporary situation of ‘landlessness’.

In this book, Allen has refined the analysis of his earlier published work and incorporated comparative perspectives with the Caribbean and the United States. Why he chose to end the book in 1936, the year the Labour Party was formed, is, however, unclear, since he focuses primarily on the nineteenth century with only minor incursions into the 1920s and 1930s, some of the most tumultuous years in Mauritain history.

*University of Mauritius*  
*Vijaya Teelock*
The chapters in this volume, so the editors claim, tell a single story. Between 1910 and 1950 the southern African countryside was transformed by an agricultural revolution. The epicentre of change was to be found on white farmlands. At the centre of this revolution stood a racist South African state. Elsewhere in the region, colonial states oversaw similar transformations. Their main task – by way of legislation, financial subsidies, cheap credit and organised violence – was the consolidation of white agriculture at the expense of a vibrant African peasant economy. It was the state rather than the market that transformed the southern African countryside. Although this transformation was initiated by Milner’s reconstruction regime in the aftermath of the South African War, real change only came in the interwar years.

This is, of course, a familiar story, but the contribution of this volume rests in its study of white commercial farming. An important chapter by David Duncan, which investigates the period 1924–48, provides much of the background to the South African state’s attempts to regulate African labour. Examining the inner workings of this state, Duncan argues that it was not a unified, monolithic entity concerned solely to promote the interests of white agriculture. It was divided and fractured, anxious not only to balance the interests of competing capitalists, but also to mediate between various sectors of white agriculture itself. Competition between various government departments frequently forced it to pursue contradictory policies. Thus, in arguing against the notion of a ‘grand plan’, Duncan is better at telling us what the state was not. At the very most, we are told that the state’s policies were applied in ad hoc fashion, an argument that does not at all square with the editors’ claim that the state was central to transforming white agriculture.

Much of this volume is concerned with violence and African resistance in the context of the capitalisation of white-owned farmlands. But there is substantial difference among the authors in the ways that these issues are tackled. Schirmer examines a single instance of fierce resistance to conditions of labour tenancy in Lydenburg and arrives at the conclusion (now a commonplace assumption among most historians) that ‘small-scale African struggles…clearly had an impact on South African history’ (p. 48). In a purely descriptive account of ‘conditions of work’ in colonial Zimbabwe’s tobacco economy, Rubert argues that labour relations were guided by an ‘informal moral contract’ (p. 241). Murray’s study of Bethal, a region renowned for its brutality in a brutal country, emphasizes the routine physical violence to which African tenants were subjected. Here the labour regime was ‘despotic’. Farm labourers in the region, in their position as ‘semi-permanent aliens’ and ‘outsiders’ (p. 92), were in effect ‘socially dead’. Thus they came close to being slaves.

Van Onselen’s study of labour relations in the south-western Transvaal paints a very different picture. By drawing on slave studies carried out in the United States, he is concerned to show how domination was assured by means that went beyond violence. Paternalism and deference were inscribed into the very fabric and minutiae of daily life in the south-western Transvaal. But because paternalism is seen as something that was actually made, this study is free of the images of stasis
portrayed by much of the United States literature. As the state intruded into white agriculture, paternalism could also be challenged, eroded and remade.

A commendable aspect of this volume is its wide geographical coverage, even though the Transvaal, Natal and Zululand enjoy the greatest attention. Crush provides a very useful overview of the difficulties faced by white agriculture in Swaziland during the first half of the twentieth century; the weakness of settler agriculture in the face of Malawi’s sharecropping economy is demonstrated by Chirwa, and wool production in the Cape (initial heartland of settler agriculture) is covered in a chapter by Bouch.

Edited collections are typically uneven. This one is no exception, but it is held together by a strong introduction and closely interrelated areas of inquiry. By placing the state at the centre of events, the editors bring coherence to the regionally varied and variegated processes in the development of white capitalist agriculture in southern Africa.

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WAYNE DOOLING

TOBACCO IN ZIMBABWE


In his introduction to A Most Promising Weed, Steven Rubert writes that his goal is to fill a void in southern African historiography by ‘examining the work, living conditions, and socioeconomic relationships of African labourers on tobacco farms in Southern Rhodesia’ (p. xi). The book succeeds on the first two counts, but falls short of providing a satisfying analysis of social relations.

The book begins with an overview of colonial settlement and tobacco farming in Mazoe and Lomagundi districts. Tobacco was well established by the 1930s, becoming Southern Rhodesia’s primary export commodity by 1945 (surpassing gold). Farmers received substantial assistance from the colonial state, including land settlement schemes, tariff preferences, research and agricultural extension. As tobacco farming grew, so did the need for labour. The colonial state sought to ensure the viability of the tobacco sector by promoting labour migrancy. By the end of the 1930s settler tobacco farms employed a stable migrant labour force, largely recruited from Nyasaland and Mozambique.

The strength of Rubert’s book lies in its detailed description of the work process on the tobacco farms. His painstaking descriptions are accompanied by excellent historical photographs from the National Archives of Zimbabwe. Rubert outlines every stage of the tobacco production process, including the development of local technology. He provides the reader with an exceptional background for understanding the specific everyday experience of the colonial agricultural worker, bringing the study of African agricultural history to its most material level.

To do so, Rubert rallies a range of primary sources. He makes extensive use of oral interviews—not just his own, but also those of Leslie Bessant and Elvis Muringai (located in the National Archives of Zimbabwe) and of Elizabeth Schmidt (in her possession). These additional interviews give depth to Rubert’s study, and are a testimony to the value of making oral materials widely available to scholars. Rubert also makes good use of colonial agricultural handbooks and pamphlets that advised farmers on all aspects of tobacco production, including labour management.

A Promising Weed contains material on time and work discipline, daily life in the
workers' compounds and work requirements of women and children. In these chapters Rubert draws comparisons with the working conditions of Southern Rhodesia's mining compounds, using Charles van Onselen's work as a reference. Farm compounds were more open and less regulated than those on the mines, a factor cited by farmers as beneficial to labour recruitment. While attractive to labourers, however, these conditions also contributed to worker desertion. Farmers consequently resorted to a number of ploys to attract and retain migrant labour, including the extension of debt, withholding of wages and sometimes violence. Labourers, on the other hand, retained some influence over their working and living conditions so long as the 'exit option' remained open.

Despite the rich potential of its content, *A Promising Weed* remains analytically shallow. The theoretical section of the book is relegated to the last chapter, where it is disappointingly underdeveloped. Rubert chooses to use the rubric of 'moral economy' to explain farmer-labourer relations. He concludes that a moral economy existed on the tobacco farms because workers brought skill and knowledge to the workplace, and because their awareness of their own working conditions allowed them to negotiate with employers. He fails, however, to state a clear definition of moral economy, and does not explain convincingly why this paradigm is useful for his study. Given the notable recent discussions of moral economy among other Africanist historians (Jonathon Glassman and Ralph Austen in particular), Rubert needs a stronger rationale for using the concept here.1

For example, he suggests that moral economy can help elucidate the intersection between a pre-industrial (African) culture and an emergent (settler) capitalism. Yet the migrant workers he describes were not pre-industrial at all – the knowledge and skills they brought to the workplace were obtained through their prior experience with commercialized tobacco production in Nyasaland. His conclusions seem discordant with conventional understandings of moral economy: the tobacco workers were not defending a traditional way of life or a subsistence ethic, but were discretionary migrants. Their negotiations with employers do not appear to have been embedded in dependency relations. Rather, there was a struggle over power in which farmers attempted to retain seasonal workers while workers attempted to ameliorate working conditions and improve wages.

Rubert's approach to gender relations is equally problematic. While he devotes a chapter to women's (and children's) labour on the farms, he does not include gender in his discussion of 'social relations' in the previous section. Women are described as workers and as victims of male violence, but there is no closer examination of the gendered structures of power and authority, either on the farms or in the surrounding reserves. Here gain, there is good material that cries out for a deeper analysis of what Bozzoli has called 'the interaction of capitalism with households and domestic economies which had distinct "tribal" and patriarchal structures'.2 By placing such a discussion in the wider context of gender and migration in southern Africa, Rubert could have made his study more relevant.

Despite these shortcomings, however, this is a useful book that fulfills its stated purpose of 'filling the void'. Rubert's succinct, straightforward prose makes this a valuable work for undergraduate students of agricultural and labour history in Africa. Especially interesting are the carefully detailed descriptions of tasks on the

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farm and the development of local technologies – to which the workers contributed their own knowledge and expertise. The book will be of interest to students and scholars of agrarian history; women’s and labour history; and migration studies.

Carleton College

AFRICAN BUSINESS IN ZIMBABWE


With independence in 1980 came heightened expectations throughout Zimbabwean society. To most it meant the end to discriminatory laws and the denial of human and political rights, an increase in health services and educational opportunities, and the hope of higher wages and better living conditions. For African entrepreneurs, independence raised the prospect of increasing their access to the national marketplace, an arena dominated by white-owned businesses during the colonial period.

However, as Volker Wild demonstrates in this exceedingly interesting book, black businessmen’s expectations were quickly dashed and they became ‘a forgotten entity’ to the new government. As Wild sees it, for African entrepreneurs throughout the 1980s ‘nothing appeared to have changed since the days of white rule’ (p. 257). He supports this view with an impressive examination of the history of African entrepreneurship in Zimbabwe, from the colonial era though to the mid-1990s. The book is grounded in Wild’s research, which included an extensive scrutiny of the African business records of the city of Harare, minutes of the Road Service Board, government reports, and nearly forty newspapers and magazines. The ultimate strength of the book, however, lies in the presence of the ‘voices’ of African businessmen whose history this book illuminates, voices drawn from the more than one hundred interviews the author conducted from the late 1980s to the early 1990s.

Wild initially looks at the issue of racial discrimination and its effects on the development of African-owned businesses during the colonial period. It comes as some surprise that he rejects the assertion made by most contemporary African businessmen and government officials that colonial laws and practices ‘deprived African entrepreneurs of their capitalist birthright’ (p. xxii). On the contrary, Wild states that ‘[t]here was no evident overall strategy, aimed either at promoting or hindering black entrepreneurship’. What did exist was ‘a consistent pattern… in the [colonial] administration’s efforts to implement European standards of business’ (p. 82). Those entrepreneurs who followed trade regulations, paid fees and taxes, and met safety and hygiene standards were allowed to do business, whether they were European or African.

Wild argues that the greater problem faced by African entrepreneurs came from what he calls ‘the business culture of African enterprise’: specifically, the presence of the ‘subsistence entrepreneur’, a person who ‘seeks profit, but does so in order to support his family, to enhance his own standard of living and to inflate his status’ (p. xxiii). The end result of these types of business practices was that African entrepreneurs consistently failed to secure sufficient capital to keep their businesses afloat. In short, their desire for profit not for profit’s sake handicapped them more than the laws and practices of a hostile white administration.

Wild moves on to examine an area where African entrepreneurs had some success – the field of passenger transport – and business management practices. He accomplishes both by highlighting the careers of four African entrepreneurs –
Aiden Mwamuka, the first African in colonial Zimbabwe to be granted a license to sell spirits; Denis Makomva, described by one friend as the ‘king of African business’; Philemon Machipisa, a retailer, transport company operator, and, in the 1970s, owner of nearly twenty houses in various African townships; and Paul Matambanadzo, owner of an extremely successful transport company.

In the final part of his study Wild examines the rise of an ‘African proto-bourgeoisie’ in the years since independence. This ‘new social conglomerate’ is made up of ‘veteran nationalists’, ‘well connected individuals’ and ‘members of the African middle class who entered the public service or private sector’ after 1980 (pp. 263–5). Wild convincingly argues that this new ‘business elite’ has capitalized on their power, influence and connections with Zimbabwe’s political leaders to promote their own selfish interests. Wild concludes by noting that ‘profit is still not an end in itself’, but rather it is ‘the “politics of connections” which prove decisive in the competition for economic opportunities’ in present-day Zimbabwe (pp. 277–8).

In Profit Not For Profit’s Sake, Wild had produced a thoughtful study of African entrepreneurs. His work fills a void in the economic history of Zimbabwe, and more generally raises questions about the cultural and social conditions that affected the development of African entrepreneurs in the past, and continue to make an impact on economic development Africa today.

Oregon State University

STEVEN C. RUBERT

BIOGRAPHY WITHOUT CONTEXT


Ruth Weiss’ biography of Garfield Todd, Prime Minister of Southern Rhodesia, 1954–8, explores the characteristics, perspectives and supporters of a man who many saw as a liberal apotheosis and whose fall from power they thought signalled growing settler reaction. Arguing thus, Weiss succeeds as narrator and sympathetic friend, although the book’s strength is in its characterization of Todd. The full range of events turning Todd from ex-prime minister into African nationalist is inadequately analyzed. Weiss points to Todd’s political weaknesses (inexperience, impetuosity and imperiousness), but her narrow focus on biography results in an exaggeration of his political clout.

In 1954, Todd was less distinctive than Weiss makes out. Like other United Rhodesia Party/United Federal Party liberals he wanted economic growth, more efficient labour and better treatment for Africans, but at the UN in 1961 he was more isolated than Weiss allows. In calling for unlikely British intervention Todd totally alienated whites. Nor does Weiss explain Todd’s political reputation, for she ignores shifting Anglo-Rhodesian relations. How else is one to explain the fact that among whites Todd went from an asset, whom overseas liberals rated highly, to a man whose British and African contacts made him a pariah.

As John Tosh noted, a biographer ‘must be someone not merely well-grounded in the period in question, but (someone) who has examined all the major collections of papers which have a bearing on the subject’s life – including those of adversaries and subordinates as well as friends and family’.

Revealing, too, the book’s structure: throughout all 33 chapters the changes that
remade Rhodesia are relegated to background. There is no adequate treatment of Whitehead’s 1959 state of emergency, the 1960–1 township rioting or the banning of the National Democratic Party. Weiss, in short, fails to link Todd to ‘the making of Zimbabwe’. Portraying him as a lightning rod for fast changing events rather than as leading character in a liberal drama might have helped.

Despite her own work on Zimbabwe and the New Elite (London, 1994), Weiss overlooks significant Africans outside Todd’s personal circle. Nkomo and Ndabaningi Sithole appear, one suspects, thanks to their readiness to draw Todd back into the political limelight. Chidzero, Chitepo, Mugabe, Nyandoro, Samkange, Shamuyarira, Silundika and Takawira yield space to Todd intimates, from his ‘angels’ (prime ministerial domestic staff) to his Chimurenga contacts at Hokonui ranch. In the near incestuous world of settler scuttlebutt many of these people became objects of derision, But Weiss fails to address the characteristics of a society where innuendo could contribute so mightily to prime ministerial demise.

There are, too, alluring hints of an argument never fully developed: if only this or that had (or had not) happened, things might have turned out better. Only in odd asides (pp. xvi, xii, 115, 121, 147) is this Lost Chance thesis expressed. Hardwicke Holderness’s Lost Chance: Southern Rhodesia, 1945–1958 (Harare, 1985) offers compelling, if overstated, elaboration of this theme, which is central to the Todd mystique. Without convincing us of ‘potentialities’ in Todd’s programs – given continued power – Weiss goes on to apologize for his overwhelming difficulties: the 1947 Dadaya school strike, the 1954 Wankie strike, the 1956 bus boycott and his fall from power in 1958. Difficulties and potentialities co-exist here without the author convincingly addressing their interrelationships.

Still, Weiss’s character analysis can be endearing as well as insightful: ‘Garfield once remarked that Grace (his wife) was remarkable in a crisis, which was just as well as he kept them coming’ (p. 203). However, family intimates are not presented in their own right, neither Grace as an educator, nor Judith Todd as a political journalist. Terence Ranger’s portrayal of the Samkanges in Are We Not Men (London, 1995) shows the value of a familial approach. Content with character, in a well-written book, Weiss introduces us to swirling controversies surrounding Garfield Todd without sufficient analysis of the processes of historical change shaping him.

University of Cincinnati

DAVID LEAVER

THE COLONIAL SERVICE


Anthony Kirk-Greene has long been outstanding as the historian of the Colonial Service. There is no-one more obviously qualified to be invited by the Corona Club, the social club of the overseas civil servants, to produce this book. It was commissioned to mark both the ending of the Overseas Civil Service in 1997, with Britain’s final withdrawal from Hong Kong, and the closure as well as the centenary of the Corona Club itself in May 1999. Its appearance coincided with a service of thanksgiving in Westminster Abbey and a large academic conference held in the University of London.

The book falls into three parts. First there is the history, some 120 pages, which charts the major stages in the development of the Colonial Service. The haphazard crystallization of individual services linked to particular territories in the nineteenth century – Malaya, the Sudan, Ceylon – was brought up short by Joseph
Chamberlain’s review of 1895–9. This was a necessary response to the rapid expansion required by the growth of British colonial control, especially in Africa, between 1880 and 1914. From a total of roughly 1,500 colonial servants for the whole empire in 1899, numbers grew to the extent that there were 1,399 in tropical Africa alone by 1914. The period 1899–1939 witnessed the evolution of the modern service, with the formalization of training, the extension of recruiting to the Dominions, the systematization of appointments, and the unification of the service in practice as well as name. Further major changes occurred after 1945 as the service grew from 11,000 to 18,000 by 1954 in response to the pressures for colonial development, welfare and political advance. Concern with the interlinked problems of career development, tenure and pensions for service recruits, and the long-term staff needs of newly-independent colonies was by then acute. To address these issues the service was finally reshaped in 1954 as Her Majesty’s Oversea (later Overseas) Colonial Service. Kirk-Greene’s account is supported by many statistical and other tables, including such subjects as women’s appointments, and patterns of Overseas Service members resettlement in the 1970s.

The rest of the book is comprised of a 28-page Colonial Service bibliography, including novels and memoirs as well as specialist technical and academic studies; an abridged history of the Corona Club; and a selection of documents throwing light on the development of the service. These range from advertisements by outfitters and the dress code for governors, to training syllabuses and extracts from the Colonial Office List and official papers. Kirk-Greene links the ending of HMOCS with changing values in contemporary Britain, notably the disappearance of long-term visions of ‘a career’ and the decline of ‘the characteristic credo of service and duty as virtues in themselves’ (p. 123). His book offers a most useful guide to many aspects of the service, and an indispensable source of reference for those researchers who will contribute in due course to any future and more comprehensive history of the subject.

King’s College London

ANDREW PORTER

NAMIBIA


_Herero Heroes_ offers big themes and a massive canvas of central Namibian history with all its tragedies. The first half of the book deals with the processes of late nineteenth-century centralization and consolidation by emergent leaders (Kahitjene, Zeraua, Maharero ‘Tjimuaha, Samuel Maharero, Kahimemua and others) whom outsiders came increasingly to refer to as Herero. Immediately striking is the density of the archival research and the meticulous anecdotal and biographical detail Gewald brings to bear on his often riveting political reconstruction.

Gewald makes no bones about this being about male elites. This is despite the hint from feminist scholarship long ago that, possibly, high politics is also about gender politics. Such polemics aside, what is most convincing in the ‘pre-colonial’ section is Gewald’s ability to address the seemingly static appearance of political structures and infuse his account with a strong sense of African dynamism, where
groups borrow culturally, conceptually and organizationally from each other in the tumultuous years before the German colonial impact. This is excellent socio-political history, giving a feel for the innovativeness of African politics, where forms of interaction between Herero and Oorlams/Nama (p. 23), even when they were often at war, suggest the later receptivity to German political idioms in the colonial period.

The centrifugal forces of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw some Herero-speakers going as far afield as Germany and its other colonial territories, besides taking refuge in Bechuanaland and the northern Cape and labouring in the Rand mines. These travels and migrations are perhaps where Gewald’s work makes its most original contribution, and again are the result of systematic excavations in southern African and German archives. This is one of the reasons why the book is important: it connects historical agents and spaces in ways that defy later national boundaries and national historiographies.

There are moments where Gewald executes superb political analysis of what his archival texts and reports might be saying beyond their appearances, such as with von Trotha’s scribbled asides (p. 192) and Daniel Kariko’s documented handling of South African officialdom in 1917 (p. 249). But there are also instances where one would question the excessive quotation and how these are ploughed into the larger narrative. Often the ‘sources’ are treated unproblematically, their conditions of production ignored, their epistemological bases unquestioned. These are the problems inherent in the positivist foundation of much social history, and indeed Gewald’s book represents both the strengths and the weaknesses of this school in southern Africa. He does not provide the reader with enough information about where the texts come form: his task is one of historical reconstruction and his voice is largely authoritative.

This makes the work a deep history, but one that runs along certain tracks. There is thus much evidence of archival passion for digging out ‘what happened’, but there is little theoretical probing of the underpinnings of German colonial culture for example, or the categories employed in depicting Christian conversion, or how literacy, photography or other forms of representation were deployed politically and culturally by emergent and indeed eloquent elites in Namibia. Though a strong empirical analysis has enormous advantages, and might offer a base from which to approach such questions, there are places where conceptual frameworks for understanding the material would have been helpful. How do we understand Traugott’s ‘indiscipline’ towards South African officials (p. 245), to take one small instance? Is it enough to assume it simply derived from his elite background, ‘elite’ being rather a descriptive term?

Gewald’s ascription of the outbreak of war in 1904 to one Lieutenant Zürn will be sure to provoke counter-interpretations from other Herero scholars. This reader wondered why the author broke his own vow to treat the region’s history as one of processes rather than personalities (p. 102). Gewald elsewhere engages with a number of significant debates that have emerged in the historiography of Herero-speakers in recent years. Perhaps because of the hugeness of his task, however, these engagements are for the most part controlled and relatively brief. In the second half of the book he deals with post-genocide ‘redemption’ (referred to as Hereroisation, re-Hereroisation or reconstruction by other scholars) and with the *Truppspieler* or *Otruppe* movements. He also makes clear his disagreement with the late Brigitte Lau’s contention that the notion of ‘genocide’ needs rethinking. Then in true Gewald style, we are given much fascinating new detail concerning another very hot topic: Samuel Maherero’s funeral in 1923 and the disposition of his body from Bechuanaland to Okahandja.

Perhaps what is needed now is the urgent publication of other doctoral theses that focus more intensively on these and other central Namibian debates and
interpretive issues. Representing the full complexity of numerous new ‘Herero’ debates is too much to ask of one book whose main task is to construct a convincing account of internal political dynamics during three decades of upheaval, genocide and dispossession. *Herero Heroes* is only the first of a batch of recent doctoral theses to make it into book form: indeed, this is its second publication as the thesis originally appeared unabridged as *Towards Redemption* in compliance with Dutch university regulations.

In conclusion, and on this editorial note, effective pruning of the sometimes over-dense, over-indulgent footnotes by copy-editors from one of the three respected co-publishers would not have gone amiss. Text, like food, can be rich without being too fatty. The author also over-extends credibility with his hasty assertions that Ambler’s *Kenya*, Delius’ *Ndebele* and Bradford’s *ICU* ‘mirror’ the situation in Hereroland (pp. 288–9). Students coming to read Namibian history nowadays will hopefully ask for more nuance than this – even as they are inspired by the range and compelling nature of the material offered in this book.

*University of Western Cape*

**PATRICIA HAYES**

CHAGGA RELIGIOUS HISTORY

*Desire and Death: History Through Ritual Practice in Kilimanjaro*. By PÄIVÄ HÄSU.


This book is based on a combination of documentary and fieldwork materials. The author seeks to reconstruct part of the history of the Chagga people of Kilimanjaro and to offer an account of some recent fieldwork contacts. It seeks to integrate into one account a whole series of quite disparate materials, from archival records of early Lutheran missionary attitudes to narratives of present-day life, about AIDS, gender relations, animal sacrifice, marriage and funeral ceremonies.

The overarching theme is ritual practice. There is a major discontinuity between the very detailed attention to early missionary attitudes and the later field materials in that there is no discussion of the Africanization of the Church, nor are the internal political fights in the Church the object of the author’s attention. Hence this is not a history of the Lutheran Church on Kilimanjaro. Nor is it a comprehensive look at Chagga domestic ritual, since it gives limited attention to witchcraft, exorcisms and the like.

What the author has done is to describe the performance of those major, largely public, family rites of passage that are related in form to indigenous practices in the past, and the way these figure in the lives of particular persons. What has changed during this century (as has already been noted in the literature) is that the full ‘traditional’ performance of marriage or of mortuary ritual, with its galaxy of ceremonies, gift giving, sacrifices and the like has become very expensive, and in its ‘complete’ form is now largely the prerogative of the wealthy. What the author makes much of is that this elaborated ‘traditional’ form is now looked upon as the full Christian mode of marriage or burial. There are, of course, less elaborate ceremonies which are regarded as ‘indigenous’. In this connection, she has some interesting (if somewhat repetitive) discussions of the concepts of ‘modernity’ and ‘tradition’, Africanness and Europeanness as seen in Chagga life. She also makes clear the enormous impact of AIDS on Chagga life and thought.

The author peppers her descriptions of fieldwork with many rather laboured passages alluding to anthropological theory on topics as various as history, transactions, symbols, exchange theory, theories of sacrifice and the like. Her interest is in how far the Chagga data does or does not fit the given frameworks.
Though it is doubtful that this approach further develops or advances theoretical paradigms, the book does present many pertinent theoretical ideas succinctly and has a considerable bibliography of such works. Overall, the book makes a valiant effort to fit the Kilimanjaro story into the history of anthropology.

The first half of the book, besides sketching in the outlines of pre-colonial Chagga ritual, is devoted to remarks on the writings of the early Lutheran missionaries. Quite appropriately, Hasu reads this material in the context of certain German intellectual traditions. A good deal of detail on the missionary record is reported here for the first time. However, what Hasu has to say about the intellectual tradition and the philosophical approach of the Lutheran mission can be found in such works as J. C. Winter’s book on the missionary Bruno Gutmann (1979), as well as in Gutmann’s own writings. Gutmann wrote voluminously on the Chagga and on his own ideas of the missionary task.

The truly original contribution of the volume comes in the second half, in the fieldwork data concerning ritual, where the conclusions go beyond present practices to try to uncover the ideas that various Chagga have of the social meaning of their own rituals. Here the eyewitness and interview material is very full and rich. There is detail in the matter of animal sacrifice, marriage and burial practices, and a substantial investigation of gender relations. For example, Hasu presents much evidence of the considerations that lead some to choose one form of marriage over another. Hasu’s discussion of the categories from which identity choices are made exposes the transformations embedded in the idea of ‘Christianness’ and ‘indigenousness’, of ‘modernity’ and ‘Europeanness’. These are important points, illustrated with innumerable details of the narrated experiences of particular individuals. Reactions to the hideous dilemmas posed by AIDS are also explored.

The book does not have an index of any kind. In a book offered as a serious scholarly work on a vast range of materials there is no excuse for this. Editors and publishers please take note.

Harvard University

SALLY FALK MOORE

COLLECTIVE BIOGRAPHY OF AFRICAN DOCTORS


Historians of Africa continue to build up an unpayable debt to John Iliffe, who produces one book of historical reconstruction after another, each one on an important subject, and each based on meticulous research in manuscript and printed documents. East African Doctors, the latest of these, is a history of Africans who practiced what Iliffe calls ‘modern medicine’ in Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania from the 1870s onwards. It provides us with a basic framework of the who, when and where of its subject. It describes who was trained in this particular variety of medicine, what was the nature of their training, what were their conditions of service, what professional organizations doctors belonged to, what research they undertook, and how they tried to shape the impact of health care and public health work on the region. Filling in knowledge may seem on the face of it to be undramatic as an intellectual project, but the very act of giving us details about the names, personalities and struggles of generations of African doctors changes one’s intellectual landscape, so that once one has read this book it is difficult to imagine ever having not known its subject matter.

Iliffe says that his goal is to write a ‘collective biography’, and the biographical details in this book are compelling. There is the story of the freed slave who
returned from Bombay in the 1870s and came to be called James Ainsworth. He began his medical work assisting a Church Missionary Society doctor at a new settlement for freed slaves near Mombasa, and continued working for fifty years. In some periods he did the largest portion of CMS medical work on the coast, but the mission refused requests that he go to England for formal medical studies. In a later period, Joseph Mutahangarwa was the first Tanganyikan to complete the medical course at Makerere. In 1942, he was sent to Shanwa where he wrote, proudly, ‘This is the first appointment of African Assistant Medical Officer to be in charge of a station in the Territory. The hospital is now being run by African Staff only’ (p. 80). During a smallpox epidemic, in 1945, he oversaw the vaccination of 86,604 people in a district with very poor transportation, while at the same time running a 38-bed hospital and an outpatient clinic, and organizing clinical trails of traditional medicines for the treatment of tuberculosis. Iliffe describes the difficulties Mutahangarwa faced, struggling to manage on his small salary, pestered by bureaucrats, drowning in paperwork and isolated from other professionals. The biographical accounts continue onwards into the most recent period, the mid-1990s. The point is not that all East African doctors were heroes, but rather that there have been so many of them, and they have names and faces, personal tragedies and successes. We can no longer imagine the medical history of East Africa as the story of named European doctors and anonymous African assistants.

The book divides the history of East African doctors into four periods. In the first one, up to the 1920s, Africans worked alongside European doctors and learned by apprenticeship, with little formal education. During the second period, Africans were being educated at Makerere medical school but were nevertheless denied recognized medical degrees and also denied the right to choose freely between government service and private practice. They struggled during this period to achieve recognition, so that the drive towards professionalism merged with the politics of nationalism. Then came the third period, the time of decolonization, which Iliffe characterizes as a time of declining status and power. He argues against the view that medical professionalism was eroded by the power of the state or the competition of traditional medicine. He sees the serious competition as coming from drug-sellers and amateur injectionists, who were able to provide pharmaceuticals without professional training, working in a context where weak states were unable to fund free healthcare systems or pay doctors adequate wages. The fourth and final period is the time of AIDS, when East African doctors have made internationally recognized contributions to epidemiological knowledge, and are intervening with skill, imagination, and compassion in the health crisis afflicting their region. The story is mostly about medical education, health policy and the building of careers; it does not focus on the cultural politics of the body or of disease, on race or on gender, all of which are in play in the book’s details, although given little comment.

One small weakness is in Iliffe’s interpretation of indigenous medicine, which he sees as having withered away in the face of competition from modern medicine. ‘It will be argued’, he writes, ‘that modern doctors in East Africa have not been seriously threatened by competition from indigenous medicine largely because, in East Africa, unlike India or China, that medicine lacked a literate tradition to provide a basis for modernisation’ (p. 5). He pictures the competition as one between two knowledge systems, outside politics. An alternative interpretation would emphasize the oppositional role played by healers in the period of conquest, and the subsequent attacks on the public aspects of traditional healing under the anti-witchcraft ordinances. Literacy, then, would be relevant to the contrast with India in a different way, because literate brahmins, who practiced Ayurveda, were allies of the colonial regime. In East Africa, healers were driven underground but
not subjected to a frontal assault. The state, whether colonial or post-colonial, could not realistically drive folk healers out of existence without providing many more physicians to take their place.

One of the book’s central themes is that East African doctors were among the most important carriers of modernity, but in this respect the analysis hangs on Iliffe’s definition of the modern, or of modernity, which is never made explicit, except through one reference to Anthony Giddens. The term recurs frequently throughout the book, with varying meanings – signifying opposition to or distinction from indigenous medical practices (pp. 26, 56), characterized by domestic cleanliness and the use of the English language (p. 83), having to do with measurement and precision (p. 57), and relying on the medical advances of nineteenth-century Europe and the United States – anaesthesia, synthetic drugs, an understanding of the role of microorganisms in causing specific diseases, and so on (p. 28). Iliffe sympathizes with the oppositional stance taken by East African doctors when faced with colonial paternalism, but then writes about opposition as a species of modern nationalism or modern trade unionism. It is hard to know what Iliffe would make of alternative interpretations of modernity, for example in Peter Geschiere’s argument that witchcraft itself is modern. It is the great strength of Iliffe’s book, however, that it does not stand or fall on its definition of modernity. It rests on the great care with which it tells the stories of important actors in the history of East Africa and in the history of medicine, so that we will all rely on it for years to come.

University of Pennsylvania

HISTORY AND ANTHROPOLOGY


This is a welcome translation of a book that first appeared in French in 1990. Jean-Loup Amselle’s work is at the forefront of a growing interest in France and elsewhere to explore the impact of colonial-era ethnography on Africa. Amselle’s primary concern, born out of his extensive fieldwork in West Africa, especially south-west Mali, is to analyze and critique an anthropology which, in seeking out the ‘true essence’ of the cultures it encountered, tended to inscribe cultural differences in stone. In this way the colonial era, through the work of such luminaries as Maurice Delafosse (who is now ubiquitous in studies of French West Africa), saw the construction of such concepts as a Mande cultural sphere, a Fulani essence and an authentic Bambara religion. These artificial constructs, Amselle observes, have been adopted and adapted by Africans, and now serve as a basis for political interaction in contemporary West Africa.

Amselle finds other far-reaching implications in the work of ethnographers of the colonial era, as he traces a line between ethnographers who helped to establish the pre-eminence of cultural relativism and the notion of a multicultural society, which, in isolating differences between particular communities, could easily play into the hands of racists like Jean-Marie Le Pen (whose menace one often finds invoked in works on French anthropology). Amselle therefore encourages anthropologists to ‘renounce cultural relativism, which could very likely be just another
facet of ethnocentrism’. Not content merely to deconstruct, Amselle proposes a solution to the problems faced by anthropologists and historians by promoting the idea of ‘mestizo logics’. He argues that in pre-colonial times, social relations in the area of West Africa with which he is most familiar were characterized by a fluidity of exchange and interaction: ‘an originary syncretism, whose parts remain indissociable’. Colonialists, however – taking the lead from anthropologists, and following their own tendency to see problems (literally, one might say) in black and white: either one was a Muslim or an ‘animist’ – transformed these social relations into rigid categories.

Aspects of Amselle’s critique of colonial ethnography have become quite common in the years since this book was first published, and indeed, one might say that the French have been relatively slow to critique the essentializing character of their anthropology. It is also worth pointing out that writers such as Bernard S. Cohn, writing on India, had already addressed several of Amselle’s concerns before 1990. Nevertheless, there remains much that is impressive and valuable in Amselle’s stitching together of anthropology and history, especially perhaps as his work seems to anticipate a new wave of African history that seeks to bridge the divide between the pre-colonial and colonial eras. The substantive later chapters are full of insights in this regard; there is a particularly fine chapter, for example, on the ‘dominated segmentary state’ of Jitumu, in which Amselle argues that French domination of the region had more in common with the earlier indirect rule of Segu than with the absolute rule attempted by Samori immediately before them. This, as Amselle points out, is not the conclusion one might have expected, given the stereotypes usually attached to French rule.

This observation might usefully have been pursued further, because elsewhere Amselle seems tacitly to posit (to adapt his own terms) an ‘essence’ of French domination: at one point, for example, he associates the missionary production of dictionaries in African languages with the colonial invention of ethnic groups. Doubtless the connection is not entirely false, but historians have increasingly come to recognize that very significant divisions existed among those traditionally grouped together as ‘colonisers’, and that colonial rule involved considerable negotiation between French and Africans. If we can problematize French rule in this way, we might also question Amselle’s implication that ‘the originary syncretism’ he claims existed in the pre-colonial era came to an end with colonialism. Amselle’s contention that modern societies ‘rigidify identity to such an extent that it no longer evolves’ seems to me ahistorical, bringing to mind those other writers who spoke in 1990 of the ‘end of history’.

It is possible that Amselle’s idea of an ‘originary syncretism’ merely replaces one set of origin myths with another; and that one could equally well argue that all history obeys a ‘mestizo logic’. Whatever the case, this book stimulates important questions about the historical role of anthropology in the formation of identity. For a recent example of how these questions have been taken up by French and non-French scholars, see the collection co-edited by Amselle and Emmanuelle Sibeud, Maurice Delafosse. Entre orientalisme et ethnographie: l’itinéraire d’un africaniste (1870–1926) (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1998).
This volume of fourteen essays emerged from an exhibition and explores the potential of visual history in Namibia. The material was drawn from the national archives of Namibia, whose activities as a filter of history resonate through the whole volume. The photographs presented are, as the contributors demonstrate, diverse, complex and multifaceted in their historical performances. Many of the essays overlap, giving a dense and even contradictory nature to the whole, but that of course is the nature of photographs.

The material under discussion ranges from the photography of colonial administrators such as ‘Cocky’ Hahn and René Dickman, and advertising brochures for Denver businessmen, to the funeral of Samuel Maherero (1923) and a contemporary community photographic project. One might also argue that the analysis of the photographs coheres around different spaces, ‘natural’ spaces, African spaces, colonial, urban and political spaces, and spaces of the ethnographic, the scientific and that of the hunter. However, one of the great strengths in the volume is the blurring of categories. Hunting leaches into the ‘natural’, ethnographic into the political. Silences are everywhere from atrocity to conversion or homoeroticism. What emerges strongly is the centrality of imaging in the colonial discourse. This is not an homogenised colonial photography circumscribed by desiring gaze and hegemonic inscription but the site of multiple and contested experiences encompassing the various indigenous peoples and the complexity and instability of colonial society itself. This is stressed by the way photographs appear in the volume several times, because they are part of perhaps contradictory arguments, regardless of whether we have ‘seen’ that picture before.

There is an unevenness to the volume, despite the best intentions of the editors. A few essays effectively present illustrated textual history rather than engaging with and extending the range of visual understanding. Others fall into the trap of a presentist analysis, without adequate historicization of central concepts, others over-play race, evolutionary hierarchy and colonialism as homogenized assumptions, rather than offering evidence that indeed this is how images were read, this is how they operated within and beyond Namibia. This is not to say that they are wrong, but that the grounding assumptions need more careful analysis. However, there are some outstanding essays that define the book as an important contribution to the field, not only for those interested in Namibia, or even southern Africa, but in the methodological, historiographical and theoretical possibilities of visual history. Emerging strongly here is a fluid culture of the imaging of interrelated desires, intentions, tensions, styles and influences. Importantly a number of essays point to the limitations and distorting grids of some Euro-American theory when applied to a case like Namibia. Here political and institutional structures of control do not necessarily follow the Foucaultian metropolitan model; and following this nor can representations of Namibia be reduced to ‘cut and paste’ tropes of colonial surveillance and desire. The archive figures large in this volume for history is texted through its preservation in Namibia as anywhere else. A number of contributors point to the scopophobia which has characterized both historians’ approaches and the institutional agendas of preservation. Marginalization and a picture library mentality has meant that institutional structures have mitigated against the visibility of alternative structures of history. This, of course, is not a problem unique to Namibia. It is alarmingly widespread, and becomes especially
pertinent in countries and in communities for whom deep reading of the visual represents one of the few ways to access their histories in the archive.

The volume’s highlights should be on the reading list for visual culture/ethnography/history anywhere. Silvester’s excellent paper on photography in the police zone challenges the containment of those overdetermined theoretical positions to reveal a fluid and complex construction of place. Trimm’s pleasing case study examines the way photographs of the decapitated body of the Kwanyama king, Mandume, displayed to the colonial camera like a hunting trophy in 1917, have been reworked by artist John Ndevasia Muafangejo. Here colonial photographs become reinvested with different and subversive meanings, performing as statements of identity and political reappropriation, presenting alternative ways of encountering history, demonstrating that even the most deeply inscribed colonial texts have the capacity to spring leaks and open new spaces.

Hayes explores the copious photographic activity of native commissioner ‘Cocky’ Hahn. The essay is a convincing weaving of visual and textual history and analytical precision. It breaks down categories, enabling Hayes to argue beneath the surface of, for instance, hunting photographs to reveal a thoroughly convincing ‘blinding construction of power signals’. Hahn’s use of the panorama camera is especially impressive, in his representation of the efundula initiation dances for the Chief Native Commissioner at Oshikango in 1935. As Hayes argues these massive ‘ethnoscapes’ are not surveillance of the stereotypical colonial gaze, they are encompassment, for they grasp the amplitude of what is beyond. Photographs may be contained and fragmented within their frames, random slices of space and time, but as this volume amply demonstrates they point to the endlessness and seamless integration that can open new spaces in which alternative histories might emerge so long as we allow them the theoretical space to do so.

The final essay by Rhode examines a community photographic project. Small photoessays by Okombahe people, using cameras for the first time, address the reader directly. Engaging and fun, they succeed admirably. However the essay embodies its own critique, for here academic theoretical elaboration is, as Rohde suggests, dangerously near neo-colonial appropriation. The interweaving of subject experience with the theoretical issues it raises make this essay an important contribution to the increasing ethnographic concern with the constituting intersections of local photographic practices with the global image world.

Whatever the strengths and weakness of individual essays, this exploration of a little-known history deserves to be read beyond the confines of Namibian or even African history. It reveals the vital dependence on the visual to stabilize the colonial. Yet it also points to lines of fracture. We see photographs literally performing in different historiographical spaces. This is the key to the whole volume, a rich mutability of photographic meaning which, rather than being a problem with photographs, is surely their strength if only we can grasp the historiographical nettle.

**Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford**

**ELIZABETH EDWARDS**

**REVOLUTION ON THE LOCAL LEVEL**


When the Ethiopian revolution broke out in 1974–75, Donald Donham was carrying out ethnographic fieldwork among the Maale, a small group in south-
western Ethiopia. He thus gained an extraordinary vantage point from which to observe the impact of the revolution at local level and was able to revisit Maale, both in the mid-1980s during the heydey of the revolutionary regime and again after its collapse in the 1990s. The book that he has written from this material provides an unequalled analysis of how the revolution worked and what it meant at the local level, which in turn is subsumed into an appraisal of the impact of ‘modernity’, within a post-modern frame of reference, in which the most personal local relationships are affected by grand global narratives, extending even to the Cold War and its collapse. Often dense but always fascinating (and comprehensible, even to a reviewer not of a post-modernist persuasion), it offers a remarkable picture of micro-level social change that deserves to become an anthropological classic.

‘Modernity’, in Donham’s usage, refers to the way in which societies come to see themselves as ‘backward’ and thus as needing to undergo the changes required to ‘catch up’ with more modern societies by appropriating forms of social organization and their accompanying discourses handed down from above. Maale of course was doubly backward, both within Ethiopia and in Ethiopia’s backwardness by reference to much of the rest of the world. Donham traces this quest for modernity, which originated in Maale with the arrival of evangelical Christian missionaries in the late 1940s; one paradoxical result was that when a Marxist revolution broke out a quarter of a century later, its most enthusiastic local supporters were Christians. This local perspective, which includes the insight that the revolution was initially interpreted as a return to a traditional state of affairs disrupted by Ethiopian conquest, is then contrasted with the metanarrative of modernity at national and global levels. The revolutionary government’s shift of alliance from the United States to the Soviet Union, for example, turned Maale Christians into local representatives of American imperialism and thus into agents of backwardness in a world in which modernity was now associated with the Soviet bloc; some went into opposition, while others converted from a Christian conception of modernity to a secular Marxist one. By the mid-1980s, when the government of ‘socialist Ethiopia’ was apparently at its strongest, the centralist imposition of taxation, conscription and the like had alienated all but its most fervent local supporters from the regime, and obedience had to be enforced at gunpoint. With the collapse of the regime about which Donham bizarrely and quite inaccurately says (p. 182): ‘the United States engineered a regime change in Ethiopia in May 1991’ the remaining local cadres were bitterly disillusioned and evangelical Christianity resumed its role as the agent of modernity in Maale. One interview with a former cadre provides a superb insight into the encounter between a subsistence society and the idea of revolutionary social change.

Superb and timely as it is, Donham’s study suffers from spreading itself rather too thin over a wide range of themes, within the compass of a fairly short book. The core of the analysis rests in the material on Maale from 1974 onwards, and by far the most interesting chapter, at last, examines the impact of revolutionary institutions at the grass roots during the 1980s; but this material is unduly compressed as the result of an urge to pursue a range of other topics, which could have been dealt with more briefly. A whole chapter, for example, is dedicated to the origins and ideology of the Sudan Interior Mission, while much of the discussion of developments at the national level consists essentially in placing a gloss on already familiar developments. Donham is concerned, too, with the writing of post-modern anthropology, and the ‘deterritorialization’ that this involves. In doing so, of course, he is seeking to write for different readerships, and to give the book an appeal to those for whom Maale, and indeed Ethiopia, may be of little account. Other readers may well find these the most important part of the narrative, but for this reviewer, the interest lies in the detailed analysis of
micro-level relationships, and the restriction of this material in the interests of a wider appeal is a matter for regret.

University of Lancaster

Catherine Besteman was employed for 12 months in 1987 by the University of Wisconsin Land Tenure Centre to study the impact of land registration in southern Somalia, where she spent most of her time in a government settlement on the middle reaches of the Juba river south of the huge Dujuma state farm set up for victims of the 1974 drought. Mainly interested in the East and Central African Bantu ex-slave population which developed here at the end of the nineteenth century under the name ‘WaGosha’ (or ‘Reer Gosh, or Reer Goleed’ in Somali: presumably from go, ‘malarious reverine forest’) she purports to embark on a novel study of Gosha ethnic formation. This is an odd claim to make since the Italian social anthropologist, Francesca Declich had done precisely this in the previous year and published some of her results in 1987. More grandly, Besteman claims that her experience in Gosha villages provides a unique window into the workings of the Somali state and, by extension, enables her to ‘probe the critical links between cultural struggle, identity politics, class and the state throughout Africa’.

I am afraid that these ambitious aims are totally unrealized for Somalia, never mind Africa as a whole. First of all, the stigmatization of the Gosha as ex-slaves is hardly news, and their partial assimilation to the social structure of their dominant pastoralist neighbours in Somali-style descent groups is well-known. Equally well-established from the work of Besteman’s predecessors in this region (Colucci, Declich, Grottanelli, Helander, Lewis and Luling) is the hierarchical local political organization, so untypical of the pastoralist Somali, which is such a marked feature not only of the riverines but of all the cultivators and agri-pastoralists who constitute the Digil Mirifle confederation in the inter-riverine region of southern Somalia. Obsessed as she appears to be with ‘race, class and occupational status’, Besteman projects these preoccupations beyond the riverine area (where they have some validity) onto the entire Somali pastoral population – a ‘social order’, she asserts, ‘stratified on the basis of racialized status’.

In the development of this racial differentiation, ‘British colonial administrators’ are presented as ‘bureaucratic foot-soldiers in the European imperialist project for racializing the world’. On a narrower colonial front, this theme could certainly have been explored with some appropriateness in relation to the Fascist period in Italian-administered Somalia before the Second World War, with which, despite its rich documentation, Besteman seems remarkably unfamiliar. In the British Somaliland protectorate of the 1950s, where the administrative ethos was fiercely pro-Somali, expatriate officials seemed unaware of the historic role assigned them by Besteman. The official who, from time to time (when the governor and chief secretary were on leave) ran the country, was actually a member of the Communist Party (and married a Somali). A decade previously, when the British had defeated the Italians, the ‘British military administration’ of Somalia might be criticized for its sometimes unsympathetic treatment of Italian prisoners (‘the enemy’), but hardly for its attitudes and behaviour towards Somalis. In 1943, the British
political officer in Mogadishu, assisted the first generation of modern politicians to establish the first major Somali nationalist club, which quickly became Somalia’s principal inter-clan nationalist party: the Somali Youth League. (For details, see my *A Modern History of Somalia*, 3rd ed., 1988).

From Besteman’s biased perspective, Somalis are claimed to have ‘responded’ to the British drive for racial categorization. It would be more accurate to say that the British responded to Somali pressures. Besteman, however, prefers to maintain the ethnocentric view (to put it no stronger) that Third World peoples are essentially passive, and that lacking ‘agency’ can only ‘invent’ ethnicity when it is imposed upon them by European colonial rulers. Without presenting any local evidence, Besteman also asserts that under Muhammad Siyad Barre’s oppressive dictatorship, racial discrimination towards the Gosha as an ‘internal Other’ intensified, and the southern cultivating Somalis in general (the Digil Mirifle) were excluded from positions of power in the state apparatus. On her (rather limited) theory of ‘othering’ (i.e. victimisation) this should happen everywhere, so it must have happened in Siyad’s Somalia. However, despite my personal antipathy to Siyad’s regime (which was reciprocated), on my regular visits to Somalia in this period I found no intensification of ‘racial’ prejudice. Rather the contrary. It was in fact commonly recognized that Siyad would gladly employ anyone, from any group, as long as he could exploit their loyalty; outside his own charmed kinship circle, members of minority groups were often particularly useful. As far as the Digil Mirifle cultivators are concerned, they continued to serve several ministers in much the same way as other clan groupings outside Siyad’s own clan-circle.

Throughout and beyond this period, Siyad’s most intriguing appointment was his Minister of Defence (a member of a traditionally low status craft specialist group) who served for longer than any other figure I can think of in his administration. (This low status category is known as *sab*, and not as Besteman supposes *Saab*, a word which, to the best of my knowledge, does not exist in Somali except in the form of the honorific Indian loan words, *Saab* and *Mem-Saab*.)

After these unsupported assertions about ‘race-making’ as part of ‘nation-making’ and ‘state-making’, it is a disconcerting anti-climax to be told after all (p. 234), that in the author’s opinion ‘while Somali nation-state policies (and colonial policies) provided grounds for constructing understandings of difference, we cannot accurately argue that such policies created these people as an ethnic group’. Here Besteman acknowledges that southern Somalia has proved a bewildering place ‘which stretches our ethnographic and theoretical abilities of understanding’. In addition, to all the lesser ‘theoreticians’ whose names she has assiduously dropped along the way, she finds that ultimately the elucidatory task she has set herself is beyond the reach even of such luminaries as Foucault, Raymond Williams, Benedict Anderson, Marx and Max Weber.

Given this failure of her social science sources, we are left to contemplate her handling of more specific Somali material. Here, alas, we find that Besteman’s ignorance of Somali history, pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial is impressive, and this is compounded by her inability to distinguish between sound primary and weak (or misleading) secondary sources. She relies on some ‘Somalists’ (as she calls them) whose pronouncements, although couched in the pseudo-Marxist jargon she adopts, are based on little if any substantial, first-hand field research.

Her handling of more serious sources is also on occasion embarrassingly uninformed. She refers to Corrado Zoli, Enrico Cerulli (1898–1988) and Massimo Colucci alike as ‘ethnographers’. The first was simply an Italian colonial official in ‘Oltre-Giuba’ who collected some Somali traditions in the course of his work. The second was the uniquely distinguished Italian colonial administrator and diplomat who was Italy’s leading authority on oriental languages and cultures (including Somali), and who became vice-president of his country’s illustrious Accademia dei
Lincei. Somali studies – to which he contributed a vast corpus of original works on language, literature, culture, history and customary law – was very lucky to catch his interest in the course of his enormously productive life; he was one of the most distinguished oriental scholars of his time. Although his oeuvre was much less prolific, Massimo Colucci, for his part, was a well-known Italian jurist in the 1920s, specializing in colonial law. He applied his knowledge of Roman Law to produce the earliest sociologically informed analysis of the Somali clan system.

While there are a number of glaring omissions in the author’s bibliography, it also has to be said that is not necessarily an advantage to be quoted (or misquoted) in this unscholarly book. My Modern History of Somalia (revised ed., 1988), which contains a detailed analysis of Siyad’s despotic regime (and which she draws on directly, or indirectly for most of her information on Somalia in this period), is referred to as an ‘ethnographic description’ which presents Siyad’s Somalia as ‘democratic, egalitarian and homogeneous’! According to the head of state’s own scatological annotations about me, that was not the view that he himself took of my account of his regime when a draft copy fell into his hands. Outraged by my critical analysis of his ‘one-man state’ and what I called ‘scientific Siyadism’ rather than ‘scientific Socialism’, Siyad instructed his London ambassador to make a pressing enquiry about my publishing plans – a development which I found flattering.

Dr Besteman’s poor handling of sources on Somalia is compounded by her weak grasp of the language – unsurprising in one who has spent such a short time in the country. One of the more amusing aspects of this is her bestowal of the mysterious pseudonym ‘Loc’ on the village in which she worked. This amounts to a really inventive ‘othering’ since the word does not exist in Somali: perhaps she means ‘Lo’, with the glottal stop, meaning ‘cattle’. Her mistranslation of more technical terms (which it would be boring to review) could have been rectified if she had troubled to read the standard literature on Somali kinship carefully, or consulted a Somali dictionary. Equally sloppy is her use of ‘Arabic’ when she means ‘Arab’.

For all these and many other reasons, this deeply flawed book cannot be regarded as a serious contribution to Somali studies, far less to social anthropology. When the author states at the outset that ‘writing this book has shown me how much I still do not know about Somalia and the middle Jubba valley’, I can only comment that this is a gross understatement. Dr Besteman is demonstrably not qualified realistically to assess her own ignorance.

London School of Economics and Political Science

I. M. LEWIS

SHORTER NOTICES


John Kirk qualified in Edinburgh as a medical doctor in 1854 and began his African career as a member of David Livingstone’s second Zambezi expedition, 1858–1863. He is especially well known as the Consul General in Zanzibar who dictated the anti-slavery treaty of 1873, effectively inaugurating British hegemony within the Zanzibar commercial empire. Kirk was a superb British representative in the era of informal empire, exercising sway in the nominally sovereign sultanate and enjoying influence throughout the cosmopolitan community of commercial interests that operated in the Zanzibar entrepot.

Daniel Liebowitz is an emeritus professor of clinical medicine at Stanford who in 1993 discovered Kirk through a portrait hanging in the Zanzibar Museum. He
and his wife subsequently retraced the Zambezi expedition’s steps; later he took the advice of Peter Duignan of the Hoover Institution at Stanford University as he developed the biography. Duignan contributes a foreword. In this brief notice, the marked limitations of the book must be addressed.

Liebowitz sees his hero as a crusader against the slave trade, sharing Livingstone’s call for civilization, Christianity and commerce. While Livingstone is diagnosed as a manic depressive, Kirk is rendered as his ever moderate, realistic but principled subordinate, later on as consul in Zanzibar to be the lifeline, somehow accountable for the survival of the famous wandering explorer. The author sticks close to the mostly published primary documents and memoirs, supplemented by certain Foreign Office series and ‘Kirk Papers’. His most important secondary sources are the vintage works of Reginald Coupland and R. W. Beachey. Owing to the lack of a bibliography and unclear identification of repositories in the footnotes, it is virtually impossible to appraise the scope of the research.

Has Kirk been neglected and forgotten as the author contends? Such a claim has little standing when a book published in 1999, by an author with the advantages of access to a major research library such as the Hoover, does not contain a single reference to Abdul Sheriff, Suzanne Miers, Fred Cooper or Norman Bennett. In fact and in historiography, Kirk is inescapably a key figure in East African history during his time as Consul General.

An original contribution might have been made had Liebowitz looked more deeply at Kirk’s identity and actions as a medical man and natural scientist, even as he developed as an imperial agent and broker. The book suggests a highly complex relationship with Sultan Bargash [sic] and his family whom Kirk doctored as well as served with ultimata. The opportunity is not taken to explore the relationship of Kirk to another interesting doctor of the time, James Christie, his successor as physician to the consulate and the sultan. Each devoted much attention to the cholera epidemics that figure in the history of the trade and slave demographics form the late 1860s to the mid-1870s. But Liebowitz is preoccupied with replaying the sagas of Livingstone and false charges against Kirk by H. M. Stanley, to the neglect of full justice to his subject and his context.

There are many errors of fact and spelling. The publishers, W. H. Freeman and Company must nevertheless be congratulated on the quality of the layout, photographs and illustrations and production overall.

Columbia University

Marcia Wright


This is a simple work, evidently derived from undergraduate classroom notes meant for a non-African audience. The narrative is derived from secondary sources about Kenyatta, Nkrumah and Nyerere. Surprisingly little use is made of the protagonists’ own writings and speeches, which should have been the first line of study. For there is no valid way of studying leadership without reference to political thought. The author devotes four pages to Kenyatta’s Facing Mount Kenya (pp. 47–52), two pages to all of Nkrumah’s prodigious output (pp. 106–108), and half a page to Nyerere’s political philosophy with a reference to Uhuru na Ujamaa but to no other of Nyerere works (p. 132). This book impoverishes rather than enriches Africanist pedagogy. For even undergraduates, particularly American undergraduates unfamiliar with Africa, need immersion in historical texts. This the author has not done. It is not enough merely to harvest
from popular cognomens Osagyefo, Mzee and Mwalimu and label them as ‘three radical leaders’. The three men were made of sterner stuff.

Rice University


This bibliography compiled by Gordon Harris is a courageous endeavour. Indeed, it deals with eleven countries in the vast regions of Central and Equatorial Africa. However, the book is confusing and has many weaknesses, beginning with the introduction (34 pages), which does not provide a clear definition of the area covered nor provide criteria used to select countries considered in the book.

Gordon Harris does not explain why countries such as Cameroon or Angola that are usually considered a part of Central Africa were not included in this study. Furthermore, the introduction is essentially a summary of the bibliography rather than an historical presentation of the regions and their cultural specificities. Because of this organization, the bibliography (187 pages) becomes a repetition of the introduction. This redundancy is even apparent in the rubrics composing the book. For example, the rubric ‘Central Africa’ appears in numerous places throughout the book (pages, xxiv, xxx, xxxvi and 1), repeating the same documents. These repetitions have unduly augmented the volume of the book by at least 30 pages.

The bibliography is completely unbalanced. For example, São-Tomé and Príncipe and Equatorial-Guinea are only given three and six pages respectively, while the People’s Republic of the Congo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo have eleven and twenty pages. Another problem is the lack of uniformity in the rubrics selected to classify the bibliography of each one of the countries. For example on p. 32, we have ‘Economics,’ ‘Economic investment’, ‘Economic policy’ etc, where the single rubric ‘Economics’ would have sufficed. Another problem is the lack of chronological structure, because the documents chosen by Harris cover a long chronological time frame, from ancient to present times. The more fundamental problem with this bibliography is that it does not provide new materials to specialists of Central and Equatorial Africa. The scholars of the region are better advised to consult Africana libraries or bibliographies contained in Historical Dictionaries published on each one of the countries in the Scarecrow Press series.

College of Staten Island.

City University of New York

François Ngolet