Reviews

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This collection of essays explores various dimensions of the successful peace process in Mozambique. Chapters by Chris Alden and Sam Barnes usefully add to those authored by Venâncio and Chan in examining the labyrinthine process of negotiations leading up to the signing of the General Peace Agreement in October 1992, and the implementation of that agreement. The full text of the agreement is included in the book.

In their introduction, the lead authors argue that whilst Renamo may have been instigated, supported and to a degree directed from abroad, ‘Frelimo had created a domestic environment propitious to Renamo’s propagation’ (p. 5). Whatever Renamo’s shortcomings in establishing its own political agenda, support was gained by its anti-Frelimo stance. I would argue that this continues to explain the subsequent democratic electoral politics of Mozambique. The big debate in the literature concerns whether Renamo was primarily an external creation of Rhodesia and South Africa to destabilise an incipient socialist regime, or whether Frelimo’s politics and development strategy provoked the internal dissent. This study broadly adopts a position of dual external and internal cause and effect for the armed dissent and its support, whilst highlighting Frelimo’s policy errors during its radical socialist policy phase, in particular the secular zeal of the Frelimo government in disrespecting Catholic and Islamic communities (p. 7). Furthermore, there was the negative impact on the population of villagisation and the emphasis on collective rather than family production. Renamo certainly took advantage of these misplaced policy initiatives to build upon rural peasant dissent.

In the early 1980s there was significant hunger. Joining Renamo gave young men and boys access to the gun, both to take one’s means of livelihood and also ‘to earn one the social prestige and respect normally accorded to warriors in traditional African societies’ (p. 9). Frelimo had neither the military nor the state administrative capability to respond effectively to the externally driven Renamo threat. Renamo fighters were operating to a degree in a power vacuum. The authors attribute some part of the legendary brutality of Renamo towards the civilian population to the work of ill-paid and ill-fed government troops and to a very effective government propaganda service. Whilst external intervention had a considerable role to play in the growth of Renamo in the period leading up to the signing of the 1984 Nkomati Accord between the governments of South Africa and Mozambique, the subsequent reduction in outside support for Renamo and Frelimo’s policy failures spurred on an internal rather than external dynamic of Renamo expansion.
The slow and tortuous path to the signing of the 1992 peace agreement resulted in part from Renamo’s lack of political and diplomatic skills compared with Frelimo, hence its unwillingness to drop the military option and fully embrace peace. Frelimo, on the other hand, viewed Renamo as armed bandits acting at the behest of outside forces, which did not help negotiations. The Italian Catholic Santo Egidio community was to prove the effective mediator amongst various contenders. Pressures encouraging Frelimo towards peace included a heavy reliance on international aid, the end of the Cold War, democratisation imperatives, fear of popular dissent in the early years of structural adjustment, economic belt-tightening, and, of course, the hunger spreading over the land. In 1992 the worst drought in living memory enveloped much of southern Africa. This helped to bring both protagonists to the negotiating table.

In the lead authors’ major introductory chapter, whilst the unnamed diplomats and Zimbabwean sources of the primary research undertaken add to our understanding in piecing together the overall picture of the peace process, it would have been useful also to have interviews with the principal protagonists. Once the Rome peace talks began, Renamo’s need for money became a key factor, along with certain demands for guarantees, which often stalled the negotiation process (p. 43). The Renamo hierarchy wanted to benefit from any peace dividend, arguing that Frelimo leaders had the houses, cars and so forth (p. 58).

The book usefully includes both a critical chapter on the role played by the UN, authored by Chris Alden, and a more positive analysis by Moisés Venação, allowing readers to draw their own conclusions. Venação highlights the important role of the UN in providing a trust fund (cash) for Renamo, to ease the transition of senior Renamo figures towards accepting a peaceful political process. The UN also managed to extend its mandate to meet the protracted peace process, and was fortunate in having a brave and competent emerging independent media with which to interact. Here Carlos Cardosa played a critical role in the successful peace process. He was assassinated in 2000 for his ongoing work in uncovering corruption. Credit for the successful peace process needs also to be given to President Chissano in particular, but also to Dhlakama, Renamo’s leader, with both abiding by their word in the peace process. By way of contrast, in Angola Jonas Savimbi used the peace process solely as a tactic in his pursuit of absolute power. Angola’s failed peace process inevitably informed Mozambique’s own experience and three main lessons were learned: the UN needs a strong and comprehensive role; timetables need to be flexible; and elections should be undertaken only after the rival armies are effectively demobilised and a new joint army is created.

Mozambique’s peace process was highly dependent on the successful delivery of the humanitarian relief component and its integration into the wider peace process. This was undertaken by the United Nations Operation for Mozambique (ONUMOZ). The scale of the task was enormous, with 5 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), 1·5 million refugees, 900,000 demobilised soldiers and their dependants (p. 109). The United Nations Office for Humanitarian Assistance Co-ordination (UNOHAC) had a strong
presence in every province and ‘played a key role in negotiating the opening of former Renamo strongholds for assistance purposes and in fostering a new spirit of co-operation between Frelimo and Renamo representatives’ (p. 109). This was on the positive side. Negatively, demining and reintegrating demobilised soldiers created significant tension and dissent.

Venâncio argues that UNOHAC failed to establish good relations with other UN agencies, and ‘quickly began to be perceived as a domineering, distant and haughty partner … Information sharing and joint decision-making amongst the UN family was not an easy exercise, if it ever took place’ (p. 110). Donors also perceived UNOHAC as slowing down the coordination process. A genuine problem was ‘how best to link humanitarian activities with medium-to-long term development initiatives’ (p. 111). Inevitably this would become linked to the difficulty of finding an exit strategy for UNOHAC. Venâncio ultimately lays his criticisms at the head of the UNOHAC operation: ‘While ONUMOZ’s saving grace was Ajello’s performance, the opposite was true for UNOHAC’ (p. 111). Personality and style as well as policy and operational factors played an important role. Venâncio’s main critique is that UNOHAC was unable to respond in a timely way to the political expediencies of troop reintegration and demobilisation. The Netherlands, Norway and UNDP instituted a Reintegration Support Scheme to meet this need to get the warriors onto a pay scheme for peace. Demining was similarly delayed. Both were vital for success.

Sam Barnes argues that the hunger, combined with the refusal of the international community to give any support to Renamo-controlled areas, because Renamo were perceived to be acting in the interests of the apartheid regime, encouraged Renamo to enter the peace negotiations. They feared losing their people and their troops to the government areas where food was available. Barnes has a different perspective on UNOHAC from Venâncio. She argues that it was important that ‘the Humanitarian Assistance Programme was seen as having a clear political dimension that had a direct impact on the peace process, requiring an impartial UN unit which derived its mandate from the Peace Agreement rather than governmental agreements’ (p. 138), as would be the case with the UNDP, WFP or UNHCR.

This volume is a helpful addition to our understanding of that all too rare commodity – a successful peacekeeping operation in Africa. Given the ongoing turbulence in the continent, it behoves us all to draw the lessons from success as well as from failure.

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Zimbabwe: the political economy of transition by Hevina S. Dashwood
Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000. Pp. 252. US$65.00/£42.00;
US$24.95/£16.00 (pbk.).

Land Reform under Structural Adjustment in Zimbabwe by Sam Moyo

Both these books provide an analysis of how key policy issues were affected by
the introduction of neo-liberal reforms in Zimbabwe. The two books
complement each other very well and give the reader an in-depth
understanding of policy processes and shifts under the change in official policy
from a command to market economy. Contrary to other works on structural
adjustment that emphasise the role of the international system in the form of
the World Bank and IMF, in pressuring weak African polities and economies
into accepting market reforms, Dashwood looks at the role of national elites in
introducing such policy changes. Dashwood considers how the Zimbabwean
ruling elite went through a process of embourgeoisement in the 1980s, so that
by 1990 they introduced the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme in
advance of pressures from the World Bank, because a shift to a neo-liberal
economy suited their economic and political priorities. This in turn meant that
national policies ceased to be directed towards any kind of social welfare that
was promised to black Zimbabweans during the liberation war. Instead, the
new policies that were pursued by the ruling elite were aimed at securing their
position of economic wealth and political power.

The problem with Dashwood’s analysis is that it is questionable how far the
ruling elite was ever interested in genuine social welfareism, as opposed to their
own use of the state as a set of resources for different interest groups to compete
over. In addition, the strict class-based analysis means that placing it in an
ideological straitjacket undermines a very convincing argument and solid
analysis of the evidence. Finally, the way that the book is organised into a
chronology of the development of Zimbabwe after 1980 again means that the
analysis is rather restricted by historical narrative. The key issues and
questions that are raised in the final chapter (which deals with current
political and economic problems in Zimbabwe) are really critical and would
have benefited from a longer and more in-depth analysis.

Moyo’s book deals with the key political issue in Zimbabwe, the land
question, and how it was affected by the introduction of neo-liberal reforms in
the 1990s. Moyo suggests that the on-going contestations over the land
question are dramatised in the renewed land invasions, and that these are
directly tied to the struggle over the political terrain of Zimbabwe. In this way
it deals with similar issues to Dashwood’s book. In essence, Moyo argues that
the new political economy of land in Zimbabwe is characterised by a
broadening of increasingly inter-linked state and non-state organisations
which contest the ownership and use of land, and that these interest groups
compete over the markets related to land (beef production, cut flower
production, wildlife, tourism and subsistence agriculture). This means that the land question in Zimbabwe is no longer about radical redistribution of land, because the key interest groups are co-opted politically and financially by the overcentralised Zimbabwean state.

Rather like Dashwood’s book, the really key issues are left until the last chapter, and the previous chapters read rather like a research report on a land project (which to be fair, it is). Nevertheless, Moyo and Dashwood’s analyses are really useful resources for students and academics interested in the current political situation in Zimbabwe. They both provide clear and not uncontroversial perspectives on the ways that Zimbabwe has changed under the structural adjustment programme, without falling into the very comfortable position of laying the blame at the door of the international system. Instead Dashwood and Moyo point to where the interests of national and global elites intersect.

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Namibia’s Post-Apartheid Regional Institutions: the founding year
by Joshua Bernard Forrest

Joshua Forrest’s detailed study tackles key questions concerning the prospects for democratic consolidation, grassroots representation and decentralisation in a newly established democracy. Namibia’s Post-Apartheid Regional Institutions stands out for its unique perspective; it investigates these questions from the vantage point not of national institutions or local actors, but rather regional (i.e. sub-state) institutions, ideally meant to be conduits for representation but clearly circumscribed by the powers of national level institutions. Forrest argues that the actions of regional councillors led to largely unanticipated consequences; these councillors were able to enhance the capacity of weak regional institutions and develop their ability to transmit grassroots preferences to national institutions, thereby advancing the very process of democratic consolidation. This exhaustive study explains how such an unexpected outcome could and did occur.

Forrest’s conclusions are built upon extensive fieldwork and detailed research. He travelled to nine of the thirteen newly created regions where he conducted 115 interviews, largely with regional councillors and governors but also with national government councillors and officials within key government ministries. Forrest was able to observe the development of the institutions he studied first hand, by attending Regional Council sessions in eight regions, as well as thirty-five National Council sessions (Namibia’s second house composed of regional councillors) during their founding year.

By engaging in both forward and backward mapping, Forrest aptly demonstrates that a review of the constitutional powers of the regional councils, discussions with national level parliamentarians and key ministry officials regarding the regional level of government, and the policy outputs
from regional councils (forward mapping) does not tell the whole story. By following the day-to-day actions of a number of regional councillors, debates within regional institutions and resolutions taken by the National Council (backward mapping), Forrest is able to demonstrate how these, at first glance almost powerless actors, are able to carve a role for themselves representing the interests of their regions vis-a-vis national government. His work clearly serves as a warning against a simple top-down analysis that would miss this activity and activism at the regional level.

The connections that Forrest highlights between the regional councillors and their constituencies illuminate a key strength of this book as well as a number of questions for further research. These connections serve as a strength, as Forrest is able to demonstrate that through their relationships to local communities, regional councillors are able to develop a real function for themselves in the new democracy. Unfortunately, these same connections, in this reader’s opinion, remain under-analysed. Forrest argues that the new regional councillors represent the interests of the grassroots in Namibia, specifically the interests of the marginalised rural poor, but this representation is only demonstrated from the top (here the regional level) down, a shortcoming Forrest himself might criticise. Forrest aptly demonstrates how regional councillors take up issues, such as the need for water in drought stricken communities, which the reader will logically assume support the interests of the poor in these areas; but our understanding of what grassroots actors want is only through the eyes and ears of the regional councillors, rather than the affected people themselves. Forrest also argues that relations between the regional councillors and local government representatives are weak and at times antagonistic. This leaves the rather important question of how regional councillors represent their constituents vis-a-vis local representatives largely unaddressed.

Despite these questions, which perhaps could only be addressed in a book twice the length of this extensive and detailed text, Forrest has offered an excellent account of the development of Namibia’s regional institutions. Namibia’s Post-Apartheid Regional Institutions will be well chosen reading for anyone interested in questions of institutional development, representation and democratic consolidation, regardless of their geographic area of interest.

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Globalisation, Urban Progress sets out a general problematic of the spatial effects of globalisation on peripheral nation-states. As the chapters proceed, one gets a sense that ‘globalisation’ has produced a three-tiered hierarchy of spaces in Mozambique: the ‘cement cities’ of Maputo and Beira (Mozambique's
largest cities), characterised by high rise apartments and paved roads; the peri-urban areas, known in Mozambique as ‘cane cities’, with similar features to many ‘shanty’ or barrio areas around Third World cities; and finally the rural areas containing a majority who live in villages or hamlets. Knauder argues that the neo-liberal essence of contemporary globalisation has produced substantial socio-spatial inequality between these three regions. The argument is developed through the presentation of wide-ranging and exhaustive statistical information, collected by the author and a research team in the early 1990s. The analytical backdrop behind the statistics is that of world systems theory.

The book’s strengths are its clear presentation of data across a wide range of social criteria – from income levels to levels of depression – and its treatment of research methodology. Too few books which use interview data make sufficient account of research methodology, leaving a serious ‘grey area’ in the reader’s understanding, but Knauder presents the logistics of research, the methodology of interviewing, and appendices of all interview forms used. Knauder does not make the best of the data, however. Depth of analysis is sacrificed for breadth of coverage. As one reads, a bewildering range of basic tabulations are presented (rarely subject to detailed statistical analysis) and subject to the briefest comment. At times, explanation goes little beyond the common sense. Two effects of this are noteworthy: sometimes, the reader is left ‘hanging’, as interesting trends are identified but not really dealt with, for example concerning the category of ‘other’ social conflicts (p. 189) and the reasons for rural–rural migration during the war (p. 97). Second, the author does little to embed the data in Mozambique’s own unique history. One gets a very limited sense of Mozambique’s history from the book, which might leave the non-specialist a little disconcerted. Rather, abstractions are drawn from the local and limited data to the world-historic level.

Relatively, the book reads a little as two narratives running more or less in parallel. There is much general comment on the nature of global capitalism, with references back and forth through the centuries and across the continents, accompanied by a quite specific set of data. This reader was not convinced that the two narratives worked well together. There is little original argument at the ‘macro’ level, and the Mozambican data is not accompanied by a ‘Mozambican’ explanation, that is, an awareness of Mozambique’s own circumstances. This may be partly a result of the imperatives of modern publishing: who wants to read a book on Mozambique? And, of course, ‘globalisation’ sells. Avebury have now produced two books on Mozambique (the other is an excellent text by Mark Chingono, The State, Violence and Development: the political economy of war in Mozambique, 1975–1992, 1996) with titles which almost hide the Mozambican element.

The book could have been improved by more attention to expression. Knauder is writing in her non-native language, which is not a problem in itself, but occasionally long sentences move the slight awkwardness of writing in a second language into obscure expression. Overall, the book has some useful material for those interested in Mozambique, or the social geography of urbanisation, but will be of limited use to others.

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Consolidating Democracy: South Africa’s second popular election by Tom Lodge

Despite the serious shortcomings of the new South Africa’s founding elections in 1994, and widespread suspicion that the result was ‘designed’ rather than achieved through impartial counting, the outcome was universally accepted as a positive step forward on the road to establishing a fully functioning democracy. The ‘small miracle’ of the transition and the euphoria that accompanied it was rooted in the fact that the election took place at all, and that the new political dispensation it effected had been achieved without major loss of life. The fact is that South Africa’s first popular election was essentially an exercise in conflict resolution. It was designed to maintain a unitary state within its historic borders and to avoid a bloody civil war of succession, or even secession. The purpose related not so much to the integrity of the electoral process itself as to the delivery, in short order, of a Government of National Unity which was as inclusive of disaffected minorities as possible. In this sense, the 1994 elections should be seen as popular formal ratification of a peace treaty which established the necessary preconditions of social and political stability within which the ‘rainbow nation’ could build for the future.

Most observers, and Professor Lodge is one of the most astute, agreed that the real test of the post-liberation democratic process would come in the second election, not the first. Apart from other considerations, the post-colonial African experience shows conclusively that ‘starting democracy is easier than keeping it’ (p. 1). The aim of this perceptive book is to assess the extent of South Africa’s democratic deficit in the light of the 1999 general election. The central question it poses is: what does consideration of the second popular election tell us about the ‘consolidation’ of the democratic process in the new South Africa?

Tom Lodge concludes that procedurally, at least, the 1999 election was ‘far better conducted than its predecessor’. In terms of the mechanics of the electoral framework and the voting and counting process, the election certainly passed muster. The deficiencies lay mainly in the over-reliance on high technology and the relatively poor programme of voter education. Regarding the nature of voting patterns, Lodge rejects the ‘racial census’ thesis (that people voted according to ‘race’ rather than ‘interest’), despite the poor showing of the United Democratic Movement (UDM) at a disappointing 3–4 per cent. His general conclusion is that despite the very clear dangers of anti-democratic temptations inherent in polities characterised by the dominance of a single party (or in this case a liberation movement that seems coterminous with the state itself), the second election compels us to take ‘its democratic credentials seriously’ (p. 209). Whether or not South Africa is in danger of becoming an illiberal democracy due to its lack of a credible opposition is not seriously considered here. However, since there is nothing in political science to suggest that dominant party systems must necessarily
degenerate into autocratic regimes, on this evidence South Africa seems well placed to build on the advances made on the 1994 elections.

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In the new South Africa, the Ciskei as administrative entity no longer exists. The region forms part of the Eastern Province, the country’s poorest, now obliged to grapple with the domestic and political violence of its apartheid past if life for the mass of its people is to improve. Mager focuses on the period between the end of the Second World War and the inauguration of the Ciskei as a Bantustan in 1959 when, with fake ethnic pomp, a landless alcoholic was made Xhosa paramount chief. The patchwork assemblage of scattered African territory constituting the ‘homeland’ finds an echo in her cluster of virtually self-contained thematic chapters, each often with a specific geographical location in town or country. Yet the book builds to a rich and gripping totality, and draws on impressive research using court cases, mission and official records, the press (especially black newspapers) and over fifty interviews (many conducted in Xhosa by Mager herself). Excellent anthropological work by an earlier generation on this very region also proved an asset.

Although neither ‘space’ nor ‘place’ appears in the title, Mager gives great weight to these (modish) ideas in the text, seeking to combine insights from feminist theory and geography and gendered history, in order to analyse how gender affected the contested mapping of the Ciskei and how, in turn, that emerging political space shaped the self-understanding and inter-relations of men and women. The challenge in the first half of the book was to draw out from frustratingly sparse and oblique official sources the ways in which apartheid’s political processes of boundary-drawing were gendered in the Ciskei. Persistence pays off and the gender focus illumines. Mager is persuasive on, for example, the distinctive importance of ‘illegal’ African women and children in the drive by white farmers and then Verwoerd himself to clear ‘squatters’ from the Border region; how the intended model township of Zwelethu foundered in part because of erroneous assumptions about bachelor workers and nuclear families; and the way single women might cooperate with the Native Trust (while others were defiantly cutting fences and protecting stock) in return for land to enable them and their children to survive. I was less convinced, however, that Bantu Authorities were introduced with such a strong motive of disempowering African women — though the government certainly wanted to enhance ‘traditional’, ethnic authority, which perhaps is but the patriarchal reverse of the coin.
The second half has a more individual and domestic focus, seeming perhaps a more conventional arena for gendered social history—but still highly relevant here is the wider context of social and economic dislocation, increased female as well as male migrancy, apartheid social engineering and African nationalist mobilisation. Mager’s probing of violent masculinity is especially valuable—the ‘war on women’ foreshadowed in the assumption (and performance) of male stick-fighting groups of their power over unmarried girls. Cattle and land shortages, together with the cost of raising children, devalued women’s fertility by contrast with their sexuality in the late 1940s, and put pressure on customary marriage practices, she suggests, hence the increase in rape, sexual assault, bride abduction and spouse desertion. The 1952 East London riots are vividly depicted as arising out of an alliance between jobless juveniles dubbed gangsters or tsotsis, and their equally stigmatised unmarried mothers, presumed loose women out of patriarchal control. The brief consideration of disturbances at premier mission educational institutions and at Fort Hare University is equally fascinating in its provocative portrayal of African National Congress male unease at female militancy and certain youth ‘extremism’. Though the book dismisses Christian attempts at alternative youth socialisation as ineffectual and inappropriate, I would have welcomed more research on church life (in all its gendered complexity) in this era, considering what a mission heartland the Ciskei was.

While Mager’s work is an important addition to South African gender studies, the ‘social history’ of the title does not absolve political scientists and international relations academics from reading it and thereby broadening their understanding of the making of apartheid and African resistance in the 1950s. Though male politicians dominated policy-making and Bantustan structures, their understandings of masculinity and femininity, as well as the actions of both women and men, shaped the outcome on the ground. As with Susan Geiger’s TANU Women (1997), the Heinemann series continues to produce pioneering work on gender history which compels a re-thinking (and a transformed re-presentation) of colonial and nationalist Africa. Africanists, take note.

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In Search of Truth and Justice: confrontations between church and state in Malawi 1960–1994, by Matthew Schoeffeleers

This is a most interesting account of the conflict between the churches, especially the Roman Catholics, and the Malawian government. It is the most comprehensive that has appeared so far. It examines the sources of pre-1992 conflict, and then gives a blow-by-blow account of the situation after the pastoral letter.
Schoffeleers notes that the Presbyterian church had been seen by some as having the closest link with the ruling single party in Malawi, and that at an early stage in the nationalist movement there had been a conflict with the Roman Catholics over the foundation of a rival party. Subsequently the ministers and priests of some other churches also spoke out on points of detail. All this was done at great personal risk, and often without support from the church hierarchy.

Following the pastoral letter of 1992, there is evidence of much support for ecumenism but not without some areas of conflict. The Presbyterians came out in support of the Roman Catholics, but for a long time Nkhoma, the synod associated with the heartland of Banda’s support (the Central Region), stood aside; for this it was eventually sanctioned by the other synods. Furthermore, among the Roman Catholics there was unity over the pastoral letter but rather less over where things were to be taken further. Also, the Vatican seemed to want to tone down the conflict, leading to the erroneous impression that the bishops had ‘apologised’. In more recent times, it has not been so clear what the churches were for where the political arena was concerned.

Predictably, Banda and his supporters reacted with hostility. The bishops’ lives were initially in danger but this subsided as a response to international pressure, both religious and secular. Banda for his part had always been concerned to stress the uniqueness of Malawi, and that it was like a happy village; but that uninformed foreigners could confuse the situation. This was precisely how he saw the intervention that occurred at international level. However, such pressure ultimately prevailed and the scene was set for multipartyism. When conceding the case for a referendum on this, Banda had expected to see a victory first for the single-party system and then for his own party.

Other interesting features in the situation are the cross-cutting ties that operated. Catholics were also represented in the ranks of senior police, helping to defuse the situation. Also, Banda attended the consecration of a bishop, even at the height of the conflict. The whole issue is raised as to how far religion is conservative or revolutionary. It is of course intrinsically neither, though it is one thing to criticise a repressive regime and another to provide an alternative: and indeed Christians cannot be expected to form a party of their own. But political life continues to be scrutinised closely by the churches.

This work is extremely well documented, relying extensively on primary research and on material which it is difficult to access.

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United States Interests and Policies in Africa: transition to a new era edited by Karl P. Magyar


The Clinton administration’s (1993–2001) departure from office has generated an increasing amount of scholarship devoted to understanding the successes and failures of US foreign policy toward Africa by the first two-term Democratic administration to occupy the White House during the post-Second World War era. The Clinton administration’s early rhetoric, like that of its Democratic predecessors (the Kennedy and Carter administrations) and liberal counterparts in other northern industrialised democracies (especially the Labour Party in Great Britain and the Socialist Party in France), raised expectations among Africanists that the Clinton White House would enhance Africa’s standing in the US foreign policy hierarchy and pursue more enlightened US Africa policies. Although the Clinton administration clearly raised the foreign policy bar as concerns the African continent, most notably by President Clinton making two official trips to Africa, in 1998 and 2000, Africanists nonetheless have criticised the administration for pursuing policies heavy in rhetoric but weak in terms of concrete actions, save perhaps in the realm of promoting trade and investment.

Karl P. Magyar’s edited collection of essays, which examines the Clinton administration’s Africa policies within the general context of the ‘transition’ of US–Africa relations ‘to a new era’ (i.e. post-Cold War), offers a welcome contribution to retrospective analyses of US policy toward Africa. An introductory chapter written by Magyar offers a brief overview of Africa’s standing within the US foreign policy hierarchy (consistently last compared with other regions) and a detailed summary of US political, economic and strategic interests in Africa. A concluding chapter, also written by Magyar, assesses the implications of Africa’s political and strategic marginalisation for US foreign policy, with a particular focus on the spread of African conflicts and US conflict resolution efforts. The heart of the book, however, is a series of essays that document the evolution of US foreign policy toward individual African regions: North Africa (written by Mohamad Z. Yakan), West Africa (Earl Conteh-Morgan), Central Africa (Raymond W. Copson), East Africa (James E. Winkates) and Southern Africa (also written by Magyar).

Magyar notes at the beginning of the book that he chose not to impose a common framework to be followed by each of the contributors, thereby leading to different interpretations of what should be included under the rubric of US foreign policy. The book’s strength lies in the historical context of US policies provided by each of the five regional case studies – an element typically lacking in similar volumes. The fact that three of the five authors work for US government agencies (Magyar with the US Air Force Air Command and Staff College, Winkates with the US Air Force Air War College, and Copson with the Congressional Research Service) not surprisingly (but not inevitably) results in an analysis heavily focused on the
'strategic' (i.e. security-oriented) dimension of US foreign policy towards Africa. The time-frame of analysis is heavily geared towards the Cold War era, with less attention devoted to the post-Cold War and especially Clinton eras than one would ultimately desire from such a volume. The regional case studies typically analyse US Africa policies through 1997, with the introductory and concluding chapters finishing with Clinton’s presidential visit to the continent in 1998. Several critical events during Clinton’s last two years in office, such as the intensification of regional conflict in the Great Lakes region (which many now refer to as Africa’s First World War) and passage of the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act, are thus not covered. The book nonetheless constitutes an important contribution to understanding the evolution of US policy towards the African continent, as well as to further attempts to offer a comprehensive analysis of the successes and failures of the Clinton administration in Africa.

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Islam and Politics in Kenya by Arye Oded

Arye Oded is senior lecturer in the Institute of Asian and African Studies at Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He has served with Israel’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, recently (1992–95) as ambassador to Kenya. The scope of his work is such that it is an extremely important reference on Islam in Kenya and East Africa. The arrangement of the text is thorough, including tremendous detail without undue duplication. In particular he clarifies, as only one who is familiar at first hand with the country could, the intricate relationships between the different Muslim groups. The Arabs constitute the dominant element in the hierarchy. They came to the East African coast – what is now in Kenya the coastal strip – before Islam came into existence. They take great pride in their heritage. Below them in the hierarchy are the Swahili, initially the people of the coast who were the offspring of Arab men and African wives. Their language is part Arabic; their culture is a blend of African and Arab/Muslim. They were an important element in Arab commerce, including the slave trade. The Swahili, in the hierarchy, are above Africans who have accepted Islam. The Somali, who dominate the Northeastern Province, are unique, considering themselves superior to the Africans, Muslim or otherwise. When one adds to this complex population various differences between Sunni, Sufi, Shi’a, special brotherhoods and new groupings that are as numerous as Christian splinter sects in the West, one realises what problems the Kenyan government faced after independence. The coastal area of Kenya was heavily Muslim and wanted autonomy, if not independence, or even to remain with the Sultan of Zanzibar. Likewise, many of the Somali in the Northeastern Province wanted to secede and join Somalia.
Ostensibly aiding this complex body of believers were agents from Saudi Arabia, from Asia (India and Pakistan), and after the 1970s from Iran, working with the Sudanese. Substantial amounts of aid were promised to various groups within the Muslim community and apparently usually delivered. The government in Nairobi watched this closely through two agencies: the National Union of Kenya Muslims and the Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims. The latter became semi-official with government ministers among its executives who, at every opportunity, urged that it was the duty of all good Muslims to be loyal to the government and to President Moi.

One point that the author makes again and again is that the Muslims, who constitute about 20 per cent of the population, almost universally believe that they are discriminated against by the government and their Christian fellow citizens. The author also emphasises the numerous offers of aid for building schools and even universities for the Muslim population, both by the foreign world Islamic community and even Westerners. Chapter 9, which deals with education, seems to make it clear that problems of poor education are in part self-imposed. To a people who believe they are discriminated against as a group, the thing of greatest value to them is their identity as Muslims. This suggests that new schools will be welcome but Islam must dominate them or at least be an important part of them. The rationalisation is: ‘The reason for our plight is we have fallen away from the true path of our fathers. We must return to fundamentals.’

The problems of political corruption, the disregard by President Moi of basic democratic rights, and the rising level of violence among the population, are touched upon but with the deliberation of a scholar. A remarkable book and highly recommended.

Dalvan M. Coger
University of Memphis

Hegemony and Resistance: contesting identities in South Africa by Thilven Reddy

Thilven Reddy, a political scientist based at the University of Cape Town, attempts in this work (which formed the basis of his doctoral research) to inject an ‘alternative’ reading into the analysis of apartheid and the resistance to that system. To his credit Reddy employs a novel approach – the bringing together of very different theoretical approaches, from Foucault, Gramsci and James Scott, to understand race and apartheid. In this way, he links discourse and hegemony as a way of understanding how race becomes an ‘everyday commonsense’, both a lived reality and a floating signifier, through the idea of the ‘subaltern’, which he takes from Ranajit Guha’s Writings on South Asian History and Society (1989). For this he employs concepts of hegemony from political economy (Gramsci, James Scott) as well as discourse theory and the idea of the ‘Other’ from cultural studies (Foucault).
As Reddy argues, during the four centuries of white domination in South Africa, non-white inhabitants were constructed in the dominant discourses as the generalised ‘Other’. More precisely the subaltern was constructed as the ‘savage Other’, the ‘ethnic/tribal Other’, whose utmost function was as a source of labour. These three conceptions of ‘Otherness’ were directly related to the self-identity of the dominant as ‘civilised’, ‘a single nation’ and a ‘ruling class’. Reddy argues that these discourses constitute ‘the tradition’ of the dominant group, and as such pervade the thinking, practices and institutions of South African society, structuring the state and civil society. The capitalist economy and the modern bureaucratic and repressive state complement this ‘tradition’, reproducing and consolidating it within a more efficient economy.

The subaltern, however, refused to assume the role of a passive object ‘without history’. The organisations articulating counter-discourses constructed a history of subjects resisting; a (mostly a-historical, but useful) narrative of the courage and bravery of the poor, constituting an alternative tradition, reverses the heroes and villains in the story presented by the dominant group. The subaltern is located in the ‘in-between’ between the dominant discourses and resistance discourses. The politics and collective identities of the subaltern involve negotiating between these two sets of discourses.

Reddy draws on post-colonial, Marxist and post-structural theory to produce a discursive reading of the history of hegemony and black resistance in South Africa. He has four broad aims, which contribute to the ‘originality’ and novelty of the research: (1) to deconstruct dominant and resistance discourses as they relate to our understanding of collective identity; (2) to problematise collective identities in South Africa, especially the constructs of race, ethnicity and class; (3) to formulate a discursive understanding of hegemony and resistance by combining Gramsci’s notion of hegemony with Foucault’s understanding of the operation of power as discourses; and (4) to critique existing historiography, Marxist and Liberal, by demonstrating that discourse analysis presents a nuanced interpretation and explanation of the changes from segregation to apartheid and the relationship between racism and capitalism.

How successful this is, is up for debate, but the attempt results in a different perspective on the static divisions in resistance discourses that are often found in writings on apartheid and resistance. Although the work can be criticised, this does not detract from its overall usefulness. For one, the layout of chapters could have been improved. For example, the theoretical section only appears at the end of the book. One other criticism is more substantial: Reddy’s ambitious intention to write political histories both of dominance and of resistance to apartheid. As is the case with much existing work on apartheid, the book is regrettably lacking in substance on the latter. Moreover, while Reddy does provide a different perspective on resistance discourses, he struggles, like most scholars before him, to avoid the rigid, often static ideological distinctions of South African politics in defining the apartheid struggle as nationalist (PAC and Black Consciousness Movement, which he refers to as ‘psychological liberation/anti-colonial’ discourse), socialist (SACP...
Female ‘Circumcision’ in Africa: culture, controversy and change
edited by Bettina Shell-Duncan and Ylva Hernlund

Female ‘circumcision’ in Africa occurs significantly across a belt of societies from Eritrea and Sudan in the east to Senegal in the west; and in the east, from Egypt down to at least Tanzania. The term covers a range of procedures from excision of the clitoris and infibulation of the labia minora of adolescents to minute nicks on the hypertrophied hymeneal tags of week-old babies. It is part of a much wider set of surgical interventions and bodily alterations, a set that includes circumcision for young males (and, in the past, destruction of the testicles, even the removal of the penis: ‘shaving’), the roughening or drying of the vaginal wall, incising and bleeding the anterior wall of the vagina, the excision of the uvula, the scarification of the face and other body surfaces, the insertion of plugs, rings or disks into lips, ears or nose, the removal of an extra sixth toe or finger, even (rarely) caesarean sections – all without (as far as we know) anaesthesia or analgesia; similarly, wounds after a fight could be sewn up, with procedures to prevent sepsis afterwards. Many of these surgical procedures have declined or ceased (though male circumcision is apparently on the increase). It is, however, the continuing practice of ‘FGM’ (female genital mutilation) that has aroused, not surprisingly, most fury and international political action. This book then is as much about that political action as about the details of the practice and consequences of ‘circumcision’.

A collection of fourteen well-organised chapters, the book is overall a very impressive, significant text that sets out to restore some balance to the debate on ‘FGM’ as well as providing much-needed data. Unusually, seven of the fourteen chapters focus on West Africa, and include accounts of successful programmes to end the practice. Two chapters, for me, stood out: Mairo Mandara’s gives the results of a survey of 500 patients at Zaria’s university
teaching hospital – the survey included a physical examination as well as a questionnaire; and Fuambai Ahmadi's offers an extraordinarily powerful account of her personally experiencing 'FGM' and of her responses to it. Such detailed first-hand material – professionally clinical or personal – is rare, and should ruffle smoothly maintained stereotypes.

What is missing is similarly eye-witness material on what is actually cut, what are the precise anatomical consequences; no details or diagrams are offered on the blood supply or on the network of nerves in the areas being damaged (‘total’ excision of the clitoris is in practice impossible); though implied, the technical skills or understanding of those who do the surgery are not explored. Also missing is the realisation that two distinct rituals are involved. One is done on babies a week old (or a little later), when the clitoris is simply not excisable; here the intention is to ‘open’ the vagina in the same way that the uvula is excised to open the throat (both clitoris and uvula being presumed to grow and cause a blockage if left untrimmed); the operation is to ensure sexuality, to facilitate fertility. By contrast, the other ritual, done around adolescence, is to close an opening (in the most extreme procedures) or to limit sexuality. In questionnaires or surveys the two are apt to be treated as one procedure, skewing distribution maps. The difference in ritual intention underlies very different ways of thinking about the human body, and not just about sexuality, gender or fertility. Nonetheless this book is an essential starting-point for a subject usually presented wrapped in rhetoric. It also shows how the practice can be changed with good will and, it seems, relief.

Murray Last
University College London

Rumba on the River: a history of the popular music of the two Congos by Gary Stewart

Few cultural productions manage to make their way through a transnational circuitry to excite a global imagination in the distinctive way that Congolese music has. The melodies inspire audiences with the infectious sounds of horns and electric guitars played to a percussive pulse that urges patrons to want to move to its sound. Gary Stewart’s study of Congolese music, also referred to at various times as rumba, soukous, kwassa and Zairois, provides a rich account of the social life of this musical form. The book makes for an engaging read; its attention to multiple arenas of significance – technological advances in the recording industry, international finance venturism, performers’ careers and performance venues, and audience formation – come together to create a stimulating biography of an African musical form.

The provocative opening begins with images of departures, which provide a framing device for the book. We follow musicians expelled from Zaire by
one-time music patron, then President Mobutu Sese Seko. Several years later, these same musicians, from their homes in exile in Brussels, Paris and other places in the world, witnessed Mobutu’s expulsion from Zaire in 1997. This opening is a reminder that governmental politics and popular music in Africa are often not far from each other’s reach. Musicians can, at one time, be allies and, at other times, become sharp critics of social policies.

The metaphor of movement fits with the making of Congolese music as well as the departure of people. Throughout the account, we learn to appreciate the ‘worlding’ of Congolese music and its generation of internationally hybrid forms. Growing from a mix of diverse local ethnic musics, Afro-Cuban music and American jazz, Congolese music emerged and flourished in urban scenes. The various names to which the music is referred to above attest that this is not a musical form that rests; it is as dynamic as the encounters it makes along its many journeys.

The contemporary setting invoked in the beginning of the book soon gives way to the historical context in which the Congo was divided into two regions by different colonial powers, France and Belgium. Each area developed a unique cultural identity, even as each sat in sight of the other, divided by the River Congo. Vibrant colonial cities, Brazzaville and Leopoldville, attracted mostly African men who were the first to migrate from villages to urban areas as they sought employment. During the two world wars, migration increased dramatically. Faced with restricted mobility in urban areas due to racial curfews that required blacks to leave white areas at night, an entertainment scene evolved that enlisted performers within these ‘black’ areas, who performed in bars and nightclubs; they developed a devoted constituency for their music.

Savvy entrepreneurs seized the opportunity to tap into a market of African consumers; thus the recording industry thrived on niche marketing of the artists who catered to African consumers. Stewart’s account draws attention to performers and producers by following the careers of individual stars and members of bands. In many ways, the early history of the recording industry in Africa resonates with recording practices elsewhere and especially in the United States, where ‘race records’ developed as the result of segregation practices. Artists recorded music and composed songs but obtained little monetary compensation for their work. Yet, an increased following helped make musicians popular beyond anyone’s expectations.

One of the values of this study is its contribution to an emergent literature on leisure and consumption in Africa. And, while the current enchantment over globalisation would perhaps point to late twentieth-century technologies in making Congolese music popular, the book usefully stresses history. Thus, Greek entrepreneurs popularised this musical form in the 1940s in their efforts to capitalise on cultural production through live musical performances. They recorded at their radio studio in Leopoldville. A thriving business developed in which performative traditions were made into commodity form.

The recording industry suffered the precarious conditions of Mobutu’s reign. His efforts to create a post-colonial national identification movement, Authenticité, found many business owners fleeing and on their return there was not much to build upon. Wages were no longer what people were accustomed
to. Still, even if people had had disposable incomes available for the purchase of recordings, the conditions in the recording studios were not up to date. Musicians increasingly recorded in Europe and began to rely on an expanding international interest in ‘world beat’.

The book ends on a sobering note, with several famous musicians succumbing to illnesses, among them AIDS. One wonders if this ending is really meant as a comment on the devastation generally faced by Africa, where the ravages of colonialism and its aftermath, in the form of uncertain political regimes and civil unrest, have left an indelible legacy that still haunts. Overall, the extensive archival research and interviews, and remarkable effort to track down every imaginable source, brings this history to life. The photographs add a visual dimension that gives readers a sense of who the performers are, in action, dress and cosmopolitan appearance. To a general audience, with little familiarity with the musicians, however, it is easy to become overwhelmed by the detail; the book can produce the feeling that one is lost in a massive number of facts with little ability to digest the material. But this should not deter readers. The opening pages provide possible clues to a larger frame in which to place the details: travel and mobility, and culture and power. The book makes a valuable contribution to studies of popular culture in transnational contexts.

Pauilla A. Ebron
Stanford University

Mondes Akan: identité et pouvoir en Afrique occidentale/Akan worlds: identity and power in West Africa edited by Pierluigi Valsecchi and Fabio Viti

A genuinely comparative field of Akan studies has so far failed to take shape – unlike its Mande analogue – for a number of reasons, including the legacy of the colonial partition and a lack of agreement as to what might be considered quintessentially Akan. It is legitimate to ask whether there is anything other than a tendency towards matriline, broad linguistic similarities and some historical interaction which renders the Akan category a meaningful unit of analysis. In their introduction to this collection, which arises out of a conference held at the University of Urbino in 1996, the editors do not seek to offer a definitive answer. They frankly admit the difficulty of drawing sharp lines between the Akan and their neighbours, but enjoin their readers to settle for minimum points of convergence. Although the constituent chapters deal with many different case-studies and time-periods, they do throw up some interesting comparative points and establish enough similarities for this to be judged a worthwhile exercise.

Most of the papers are historical in nature and deal with some or other aspect of the politics of lineage, chieftaincy and state. The contested relationship
between autochthons and Akan immigrants (Terray), and between ruling and junior lineages (Pavanello, Perrot, Schirripa), is a recurrent theme. A number of contributions touch on contested oral traditions which reflect a map of power relations that is often at odds with perceptions of history. The piece by Emmanuel Terray deals eloquently with this theme, and provides a foil for Fabio Viti to argue for a fundamental difference between the Baule – who he argues developed a political form which was neither state nor acephalous – and the instance of Abron. The importance of the Atlantic trade in opening up new veins of accumulation and sources of political power in the coastal areas, is dealt with by Yann Deffontaine, Ray Kea and Gérard Chouin in relation to Oguua, Fanteland and Eguafa respectively. An overlapping set of papers deals with the religious sphere – that is the points at which the Akan engaged with the spirit world and, in due course, with Christianity (Kea, Duchesne, Schirippa). The European influence, at the level of thought and praxis, is addressed in a number of contributions. Ivor Wilks offers a fresh synthesis of his voluminous writings on Asante by concentrating on shifting responses to British imperialism as manifested in ideas about progress. Giampaolo Novati, on the other hand, considers why Asante resistance to British imperialism ultimately failed whereas the Ethiopians successfully kept the Italians at bay.

As this skeletal description demonstrates, there are numerous points at which the constituent articles intersect, lending a measure of coherence to the volume as a whole. The final category of papers, dealing with the contemporary period, sits more uneasily alongside the others because the authors pull up short at the international boundary. Harris Memel-Foté deals somewhat polemically with the manner in which the PDCI regime after independence sought to entrench an Akan hegemonic discourse, in which the Baule were held to be the bearers of a glorious tradition of statecraft and of civic virtue. This resonates with Viti’s argument to the effect that it was the French who manufactured a monarchical tradition which had not been present in pre-colonial times. Kwame Arhin’s overview of Akan political institutions is confined to the peoples of Ghana, as is the passionate advocacy of a political role for chiefs on the part of the Omanhene of western Nzema, Awulae Annor Adjaye III.

The balance between the choice of case-studies may not be to the liking of all students of the Akan world. Unusually, the Nzema receive the lion’s share (no fewer than three chapters), whereas the Asante case receives less treatment than is customarily the case. The omission of the eastern Akan states of Akyem, Akuapem and Akwamu is obvious, but in fairness to the editors their intention was never to compile a compendium of the Akan peoples. In what has been served up there is much that is of utility for others who would pursue a comparative agenda. As an effort to bridge the divide between the French and Anglophone intellectual worlds, the volume is especially welcome. It is perhaps significant that the initiators of this project are themselves Italian.

Paul Nugent
University of Edinburgh
The Quest For Fruition Through Ngoma: the political aspects of healing in Southern Africa edited by Rijk van Dijk, Ria Reis and Marja Spierenburg

An admirable feature of Africa that, over the years, has not been given due recognition is the capability of its people and societies to bring about comfort, happiness and consolation to both individuals and societies in distress, tribulations and trials. This capability has over the years been sufficiently demonstrated in diverse ways including the resilience of the African to face hurdles, capability to accommodate friends, relatives in distress and power to console people in difficulties through music, dance and socialising.

In spite of the aforementioned admirable feature, there is always the tendency especially on the part of Eurocentric writers, to dismiss the continent as deficient in ways and means of bringing about happiness to individuals and societies in difficult circumstances. There is for example, the general belief that in the field of conflict management, Western-oriented strategies are the best for Africa. This is an unfortunate development as the crucial role of African systems in conflict management is totally ignored. It is against this background that the significance of the book should be assessed.

The book, to begin with, should be regarded and accepted as a laudable genuine African effort to shed light on the capacity of the African to overcome tribulations and to bring about political order and stability. The book helps to provide Africans with the opportunity to draw inspiration from the continent’s rich sociocultural and political practices. This will not only contribute to the restoration of the true value and stature of African culture and achievements in the wider order of human progress, but will act as a catalyst to boosting Africa’s cultural image.

The book provides an insightful and constructive review of Jansen’s 1992 work on *ngoma* by bringing together the works of distinguished scholars on specific southern African settings. Unlike Jansen, the authors singularly and collectively, interpreted *ngoma* beyond the limited scope of healing to incorporate political, cultural, economic and social aspects (p. 6). They also emphasise the role of the clientele, a crucial factor ignored by Jansen. This aspect of the book’s perspective is commendable as it helps to broaden the reader’s understanding of *ngoma* in its diverse manifestations. Jansen himself confirms this admirable feature of the book when he notes that the authors of *The Quest for Fruition* did a very good job by reducing *ngoma* to its varied and fundamental characteristics (p. 166).

Although the book addresses many important themes bordering on the various socioeconomic, cultural and political aspects of African societies, I will limit my review to three major themes. These are gender relations, the close relationship between healing and politics, and the influence of the West on African socioeconomic, cultural and political institutions and practices.
That ngoma represents an African initiative to portray the hectic struggle between the sexes for political space and influence is well discussed in various chapters of the book (chapters 2, 3 and 5). In her chapter, on ‘Gender and Ngoma’, Annette Drew uses the Kunda of Eastern Zambia to shed light on among many others things ngoma’s ability to manifest the contradictions between men and women. She brilliantly enlightens readers on ngoma’s role as an African initiative to show the specific roles of the sexes and on how the drum can be used to defend gender identities. She informs readers, for example, that drums among the kundas are associated both with healing and the public domain of politics, roles generally identified with women and men respectively (p. 42). Her interpretation of the prohibition of the use of the drum by women in the chinamvvalu initiation ceremony as a deliberate attempt by men to deny women’s access to social and spiritual influence is very helpful and instructive in showing the struggle between men and women for political and social space. Furthermore, Drew’s brilliant description of chinamvvalu’s main features of training young girls for taking good care of men in bed also helps to throw light on the prevalent view that women were to be subordinate to men. Although one can be tempted to support this view, there are reasons to believe that this did not tell the whole story about gender relations and perceptions in Africa.

Another theme competently addressed by the authors of this book worthy of consideration in this review is the vivid portrayal of the close relationship between healing and political powers in African settings (chapters 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8). Individually and collectively, the authors clearly show the healing and political aspects of ngoma. Using the Mhondoro cult in Zimbabwe, Spierenburg for example, clearly shows the African attempt through the use of cult to solve community and individual problems and also to ensure dignity and respect for political authority. Although the Mhondoro cult is significantly concerned with the well-being of individuals and the community its political significance cannot be underestimated. Spierenburg clearly informs readers for example that the cult helps to bring about the prosperity and happiness of the people by ensuring the fertility of the land and providing solutions to their problems (p. 79). However, the cult also provides rules and regulations for the smooth functioning of society, ensures the respect and dignity of political authority and prescribes procedures for political succession.

Finally, the authors of this book should be commended for the competent way in which they throw light on the impact of the West on the African socioeconomic, cultural and political practices. Annette Drew’s chapter on ‘Gender and Ngoma’ for example, clearly shows the fruitless attempts on the part of Christian missionaries to discredit African cultural practices as unchristian (p. 42). She is able to show, for example, the African resolve to preserve and protect fundamental cultural practices even in the face of Christian attempts to undermine them. Spierenburg’s chapter on the Mhondoro cult is also very helpful in shedding light on the influence of colonialism on African political practices. She informs readers for example that the advent of colonialism precipitated among many other things the erosion of the dignity and respect of African chiefs (p. 81). This she confirms by asserting that the colonial authorities did not only employ chiefs but also tampered with certain
chiefly lineages (p. 81). This perspective of the book is commendable as it enables readers to critically review the role of the West in African socioeconomic cultural and political spheres of life.

In conclusion, although the authors competently show the African capacity to overcome tribulations and trials through ngoma, they do not us tell in detail how this rich African practice can be improved and preserved in the face of dynamic global developments. In this regard, readers have been challenged to contribute to the search for ways and means of improving this rich African practice.

OSMAN GBLA  
University of Sierra Leone

Race and Reconciliation in South Africa: a multicultural dialogue in comparative perspective edited by WilliaM E. VAN VUgT and G. Dann Cleote  

Religion plays a prominent role in South African public and political life. The Dutch Reformed Church (NGK) provided theological support for apartheid and was integral to apartheid structures like the Afrikaner Broederbond. On the other side, clerics like Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Frank Chikane, Alan Boesak and Beyers Naude were instrumental in the liberation struggle, providing moral and political guidance. Post-apartheid, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was unabashedly rooted in Christian theology. Consequently, a book exploring race and reconciliation in South Africa from a religious perspective promises to contribute valuable insights to the ongoing process of transformation.

Race and Reconciliation in South Africa is a compendium of papers presented at a conference held in 1999 at the University of the Western Cape. This conference brought together scholars of religion from Europe, North America and Africa and was ‘inspired by the collapse of apartheid in 1994, Nelson Mandela’s rise to the presidency, and the formation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)’. It sought to ‘create a multicultural, scholarly dialogue on the history, theology, philosophy, and politics of race and reconciliation in South Africa’. The book is comparative in method ‘using examples from other nations and cultures to explore what is distinctive about South Africa’ (p. xi).

The book’s eleven chapters cover a wide range of topics. Among them are Paul’s letter to the Galatians and its relevance for understanding a pluralistic and divided South Africa (G. Dann Cleote), a comparative history of British immigration to the US and South Africa (William van Vugt), ecclesiastical racism in South Africa and the US (R. Drew Smith), religious associations in South Africa and Zimbabwe (Tracy Kuperus), the South African Bill of Rights (Laurens M. du Plessis), multiculturalism (Johan Degnaar), and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Pieter Meiring).
All of the chapters are well written and interesting, and some of the individual chapters are fascinating. Pieter Meiring’s intensely personal account of his experience on the TRC, for example, is quite moving. Unfortunately, the range of topics covered and the scope of methodologies adopted make for a curiously scattered effort. The student of homiletics may appreciate Cleote’s exploration of Paul’s Letter to the flock at Galatia, but others may wonder if it has more than heuristic value for understanding the politics of modern South Africa. Similarly, du Plessis’ analysis of the new Bill of Rights stretches to find a biblical context for a secular document more rooted in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights than in the scriptures.

The volume emphasises the so-called ‘white’ churches – Afrikaner and English. With a few exceptions, the voice of the African Christian tradition in South Africa is missing. There is little discussion of position of the African Initiated Churches (AICs) and their 9 million members during the liberation struggle and their attitudes after the change. Desmond Tutu can usually be relied upon to provide an African insight, but not this time. His ‘Foreword’, much touted on the book jacket, consists of three paragraphs of largely uninformative, and uninspired, prose.

This book tries to study race and reconciliation in contemporary South Africa in a comparative context and from historical, philosophical, theological and political perspectives. In so doing, it tries to do too much at once. Unfortunately, as is often the case with edited conference proceedings, the volume has ample breadth but lacks theoretical coherence and thematic consistency. Though there are some gems amongst the chapters, the title promises more than the book delivers.

J. BARRON BOYD, JR.
Le Moyne College, Syracuse, NY


This book was originally a Ph.D. thesis, and considered to be one of the best three dissertations in political science in The Netherlands in 1997. The research is based on an extensive examination of OAU documents, newspapers and publications from more than thirty African countries, interviews with African diplomats and OAU officials, and the secondary literature. Impressively, these sources were researched for the entire 1963–93 period. The primary objective of the book is to explain the role and function of the OAU in inter-African politics, particularly in relation to its ‘ideological groundwork’, or, its place in African political thought. Additionally, it sets out to reveal how the OAU is perceived by member states and OAU functionaries, the nature and extent of political cooperation in Africa, and to dispel some of the common misconceptions regarding the origins of the Organisation, its (ir)relevance to African international relations and its glaring weaknesses.
In pursuit of these ambitious aims, the book covers a tremendous amount of ground, both in its time-frame and the issues it touches on. In the first three chapters, the author outlines the study in terms of its methodology and its theoretical underpinnings. A useful overview of the structural features of inter-African politics, and the historical background to the emergence of African nationalism and Pan-Africanism, is also presented here. The core of the book revolves around the five following chapters which analyse the formation of the OAU (chapter 4), its internal functioning and organisational structures (chapter 5), its role in the anti-colonial struggle (chapter 6), and the Organisation’s attempts to manage Africa’s political order, primarily through conflict management (chapters 7 and 8). The final chapter is a fairly useful conclusion.

The book argues that understanding the roles and functions of the OAU, as well as its paradoxes and ambiguities, lies in three domains. First, at the level of inter-African politics, the lack of any sort of hegemonic leadership in the region gives members too much freedom of manoeuvre, thereby resulting in a minimalist organisation, free-riding, ambiguous norms, the salience of regional cleavages, and decision-making marked by laborious, inefficient procedures, indecision and deferment. Nevertheless, the OAU is a regime, albeit a weak one, which is hampered not so much by lack of political will, as by ‘its inability, through lack of leadership, to sufficiently co-ordinate the willingness of the collectivity of states’ (p. 367). Second, Africa’s peripheral and dependent status in global terms ‘reinforces the effects of the absence of hegemonic leadership’ (p. 369). Third, state elites make foreign policy choices which are structured and conditioned by the domestic context of African states, which usually means short-term measures aimed at survival.

What is impressive about the book, apart from its extensive scope, is its original and penetrating analysis of the key events and underlying factors which have shaped the Organisation’s evolution. Its explanatory power is enhanced, furthermore, by the intelligent and eclectic application of relevant theoretical approaches, such as hegemonic stability theory, dependency theory and game theory. It is not simply a dry recounting of diplomatic history, but engages theoretical notions which have wider application than Africa. Its insights will no doubt inform the analysis of other regional and international organisations. I also found it to be balanced in its assessments, avoiding both an apologist tone and the all-too-familiar Afro-pessimism. It does not shy away from frankly addressing the worst aspects of the OAU, while at the same time accounting for the Organisation’s longevity in terms of its genuine achievements and the role it has forged for itself. In this regard, the book helps to dispel many common misperceptions about the OAU and inter-African affairs in general. Lastly, the book contains some genuine insights into both African political thought as it has evolved (see p. 393), and the importance of the political psychology of African elites – an area of international politics sorely neglected.

The book is not without its limitations, however. In the first instance, at over 400 pages of text it is cumbersome, and there is a great deal of material which could be summarised or cut altogether, as it adds little to the overall argument. In fact, the first three chapters could be cut altogether and
summarised briefly in a page or two. Second, the form of the book is too close to its original form as a dissertation to be user-friendly. It is over-structured, over-referenced and contains too much repetition in the all too frequent summaries and introductions. I feel that the publishers have done the author a disservice, as its thesis-like form detracts from its otherwise excellent content. Third, the explanatory platform of the overall argument has a weak link, namely, its analysis of domestic structures on African foreign policy. Here, Joel Migdal’s ‘weak state politics’ framework would have provided a useful addition and given the book a powerful symmetry. Lastly, it is unfortunate that the book ends its analysis in 1993. Although the author concedes that the reforms of this period constituted a ‘remarkable break with the past’ (p. 391), only a cursory examination is provided.

Overall then, I would highly recommend this book for its wealth of information and its intelligent analysis to anyone interested in inter-African politics, or the politics of international organisations.

RICHARD JACKSON
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Ethnicity and Nationalism in Africa: constructivist reflections and contemporary politics edited by PARIS YEROS

The contributors to this book are linked by ‘an understanding of ethnicity and nationhood as phenomena that are socially constructed, as products of human thought and action’ (p. 1). The volume thus defines itself in contrast to primordialist approaches to the topic, even though through the 1990s there appeared to be few primordialists represented in academic publications. The volume’s two central questions are: ‘what is constructivism and what are its political implications?’ (p. 1). The first question is much better addressed than the second. Indeed, the book’s subtitle is somewhat misleading since the book focuses far more on constructivist reflections than it does on contemporary politics. In fact, this volume is concerned mainly with the study of ethnicity and to a lesser degree nationalism, rather than ethnicity and nationalism themselves. This is the book’s strength, because it provides a critical look at methodological issues and the state of scholarship.

Though motivated by a ‘concern with understanding the contexts and meanings of ethnic and nationalist politics ..., expanding citizenship and deepening democracy’ (pp. 8–9), with the laudable goal of reclaiming Africans’ agency, the authors have trouble translating their discussion into praxis. Since much space is spent reviewing and analysing the literature, precious little discusses actual African ethnicities or nationalisms. For example, the index lists 46 authors, but only seven countries and no ethnic groups. A
partial exception is Thomas Hylland Eriksen’s chapter, ‘A Non-ethnic State for Africa? A Life-world Approach to the Imagining of Communities’, which draws lessons from ‘quasi-African’ Mauritius (p. 50). Since the case is highly atypical, however, the author doubts its applicability to Africa’s multi-ethnic states. John Markakis’ discussion of Ethiopia and Eritrea in ‘Nationalism and Ethnicity in the Horn of Africa’ is the most grounded contribution to the collection. Only Terence Ranger’s brief ‘Concluding Comments’ brings in a range of empirical examples.

The other four chapters remain on a more abstract level. For example, the editor’s contributions develop and critique a typology of normative constructivisms, comprising transactionalism, instrumentalism, inventionism and moral ethnicity. Clearly, this book is not for the uninitiated. Aletta J. Norval’s post-structuralist chapter on ‘Rethinking Ethnicity: Identification, Hybridity and Democracy’ is particularly difficult.

As for contemporary politics, disappointingly little is said. Despite promises to provide insights into ‘the proliferation of ethnic conflict, “democratisation”, and the “retreat” of the state’ (p. ix), I was left with no particular new ideas that I could carry into my own work. Indeed, relevant topics such as inter-ethnic relations, conflicts and conflict resolution, political parties, multipartyism or neo-patrimonialism are not discussed.

This book will appeal to scholars in a number of disciplines (especially history, political science and anthropology) who have a strong interest in the theoretical study of ethnicity and nationalism. They might consider it a compelling contribution to current debates. Those looking for empirically grounded subject matter, however, are advised to search elsewhere.

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