Reviews

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‘We Women Worked So Hard’: gender, urbanisation and social reproduction in colonial Harare, Zimbabwe, 1930–1956 by Teresa A. Barnes

This spirited addition to the illustrious Social History of Africa series stands somewhere between Bozzoli’s Women of Phokeng (1991) and Geiger’s TANU Women (1997): more concerned than Bozzoli to make an intervention in the analysis of nationalism (though sharing her stress on the historical significance of women’s household-building labours), but more domestically focused and less geared to country-wide political concerns than Geiger. Barnes has rich oral sources to draw on (in part from her earlier research with Everjoice Win), enlivening her investigation of how, in colonial Salisbury up to the mid-1950s, African women experienced work, housing, relations with men, organisational life and nationalist struggles. The notion of ‘social reproduction’ is central to her argument that women helped wage a campaign wider and deeper than the narrowly conceived, triumphalist nationalism of a male elite – as inspired by the quote, ‘We women worked so hard – we were the first ones to fight, even if we didn’t hold guns’ (p. xvi). Theirs was a costly struggle for viable, mobile, urban African families, free to build a sustainable, proper life in town according to their own priorities. Rather than use respectability (as in South Africa) or the proper woman (as Jessica Ogden did for Kampala), Barnes takes her cue from Zimbabwean women’s elevation of those who were well known for their education, solid marriage (i.e. involving lobola or bridewealth) and substantial housing. Perhaps this has a certain logic – in view, say, of the way Victorian women’s ‘character’ or reputation was all-important (though that tended to be reduced to their sexual ‘purity’). Aspirations towards what she decides to call righteousness had an energising effect on women and families. Women did not want merely to survive – they wanted to live properly, and esteemed those who managed to do so – making social differentiation and hierarchy acceptable and expected.

Barnes stresses that women struggled not simply against denigration by settler whites or state obstruction of conjugal solidarity, but also against the way their own men stigmatised urban women who did not fit the desired stereotype of the good stay-at-home wife. Husbands could forbid women teachers to contribute to household advance by earning money: although they ‘had certificates in their houses’, they ‘just sat, waiting for what “Daddy” would bring’ (quote, p. 125). Nevertheless, schooling taught some that ‘crocheting has got money’: one who ‘lived on doilies’ urged her niece, ‘Use a crochet [hook], there is life in it’ (p. 32). Those out on the streets were...
deemed street-walkers – even a woman with a bicycle could be seen as a prostitute. Female independence came to be equated with evil. Hence, male nationalists virtually sanctioned the rape of women who broke a transport boycott in 1956 – as independent earners and hostel-dwellers, they were particularly vulnerable.

Barnes makes a (rather brief) case for the 1948 strike having gender relations at its heart. Even if urban women stayed indoors as instructed, male strikers’ demands aimed to put town families on a more secure footing, not simply via higher wages but also through food rations for wives, recognition of African marriages, and provision of more married housing. Such issues also fuelled Charles Mzingeli’s union activism. The final chapter offers invaluable coverage of urban African women’s organisations, whether explicitly political and nationalist; facilitating social reproduction; or buttressing class-based social and domestic skills. While quoting Shamuyarira’s eloquent tribute to the boost which powerful women speakers and canvassers gave the nationalist movement, Barnes also calls for more focused research both on female political commitment and the interplay of religious faith with women’s organisations. But female church groups and the role of Christianity in general are a serious absence for her own argument. Her chosen term of female ‘righteousness’ cannot easily be bleached of its religious flavour, nor is there enough evaluation of how far church or mission-school prioritisation of maternal and marital roles inspired and sustained African women’s work of social reproduction.

The evocative cover photograph provides a splendid springboard for her compassionate conclusion, where Barnes asserts that African society survived at the cost of women’s pain. Living in Harare for almost a decade, she saw how women were ‘inadequately compensated for extraordinary feats of endurance’ (p. 177). The reward for their heavy load of family responsibilities – while men got material and political power in the present – was the imagined community of their children’s future potential, a hard bargain which good women accepted. This is a deeply felt, richly documented study which will surely contribute to the rewriting of Zimbabwean urban, gender and nationalist history.

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Prosperity and Violence: the political economy of development by Robert H. Bates

Why is intra-state war chiefly a phenomenon of poor countries? But why also are some middle-income countries like Colombia and those of the former Yugoslavia prone to chronic and large-scale organised violent conflict? Are there in fact more ‘major armed conflicts’ since the end of the Cold War than
during it? Are contemporary conflicts ‘new wars’? Do they represent the past repeating itself in a ‘new medievalism’? Or do they fit neither interpretation? What exactly are the links between violence and development? Does violence occur when development goes wrong, or when development fails to take place, or does development somehow promote violence?

Thanks to a rapidly expanding literature on the political economy of violent conflict, these and other questions have of late received increasingly rich attention. Many development economists have begun to rewrite their theories (though not radically to change them) to incorporate the centrality of violence. Robert Bates’s essay is an elegantly, generously written example of this trend. The book does touch on some of the questions above, indeed one or two of them are at its core, but it is frustrating in its silence on others. The level of detail and empirical caution foregone in the essayist’s broad sweep is especially unsettling.

There are two main themes to Bates’s analysis of the relationship between violence and development. One is a historical theme that appears to bear a strong influence from Charles Tilly’s work on early modern state formation, through the interaction of coercion and capital in the politics of centralising authorities. Bates argues that pre-modern societies, based on family networks, engage in the private provision of violence (defensively and aggressively) and that this is effective but inefficient. Over time this inefficient institutional basis is acknowledged and more organised states emerge from contractual interactions of centralising powers and decentralised interest groups. Hand in hand with economies of scale and mercantilist promotion of industrialisation goes a shift towards the public provision of violence or force. Violence changes from a means of predation to a productive resource for the protection and accumulation of capital. For Bates, in a particularly infelicitous phrase but one that perhaps reveals some of the limitations to this linear argument, the process is one of the domestication of violence.

The great change that gave momentum to this parallel and mutually supportive process of economic development and the transformation of violence into a publicly managed good is presented by Bates in terms of supply and demand. With the commercialisation of agriculture and rising demand for its outputs, fighting increased but so too did the value of peace and the demand for peace. States obliged, mobilising new-found resources to repress and co-opt regional warlords. The hint of political equilibrium is one among many signs throughout this book of the essentially economistic reading of human history and development. Social phenomena are typically subordinate to economic or developmental efficiency. And this is the second main theme of interest, a less directly stated analytical framework. There are no unintended consequences here, no bitter and uncertain struggles, no strange breaks in the gradual evolution of efficient institutions. Yet how good, for example, is the evidence for a rise in violence with commercialisation of agriculture? Did not a good deal of vicious conflict (and efforts at centralising force) in England, for example, precede and in some complex way allow for later successful political and economic development, as Barrington Moore argued? Was Europe not for centuries before even the early modern period a site of violent centralising efforts and violent resistance to these efforts, irrespective of the
development of economic efficiency? Are there not rather horrible ironies in a country like the USA in Bates’s idea of the domestication of violence?

Finally, despite the fact that this is a genuinely interesting and highly readable book, it lacks real force. It is easy to agree that contemporary developing countries in some ways are going through experiences and challenges of a kind that European countries faced centuries ago, and indeed that the international economic and political environment within which they do so is significantly different. Yet another historical parallel is missing. For the beginnings of capitalism (a word barely used in this book) were undeniably uneven, non-linear, in most places extraordinarily slow, and everywhere accompanied by the extraordinary violence of primitive accumulation. As Marx put it, primitive accumulation is to political economy what original sin is to theology. And the study of the political economy of development and of violent conflict in contemporary societies surely needs to be the study of this phase of primitive accumulation and its varieties, points of susceptibility to progress, and the formation of and relations among particular classes.

One example would be the relationship between established international capital and on-the-ground original sin. On this Bates is silent, in fact worse: referring to Congo-Kinshasa, his claim that its ‘internal wars [are] of little interest to those with the resources with which to terminate them’ could be taken as naïve or misleading, given the obvious connections between these wars and the international, particularly US, economy’s interest in resources such as tantalite, the heat-resistant metal that is applied in space technology, mobile phone chips and games consoles. Where Sierra Leone and Angola produce conflict diamonds, Congo produces the real material stuff that helps produce virtual Playstation conflicts.

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A Country Unmasked: inside South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission by Alex Boraine

Alex Boraine’s book is a detailed memoir of the author’s experience as a founder and Deputy Chair of South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Boraine, a Methodist churchman, member of the parliamentary opposition to the National Party, co-founder of the Institute for Democratic Alternatives (IDASA), was a stalwart of white ‘liberal’ politics in the apartheid era. He presents his book as ‘a personal account of hope breaking the bonds of hopelessness and goodness triumphing over evil, through truth-telling and accountability’ (p. 3).

Boraine clearly identifies the central question of the post-apartheid era. How, after all the multi-faceted evil and violence of the apartheid era, can a polity forge a new, workable, multi-racial state? How can a fragmented and
divided state transcend its history and come to groups with the challenges – unemployment, economic inequity, poor education, AIDS – which would plague it even without the legacy of racism? For Boraine, the TRC was key. By providing a forum for victims and victimisers alike to tell their stories honestly and completely, it was supposed to lay the basis for forgiveness and reconciliation.

Realising that it could not report every incidence of abuse in the struggle against apartheid, one of the Commission’s fundamental aims was to help create a culture of rights where none existed before. Apartheid violated all generally accepted notions of human rights and South Africa had no concept of individual rights in its political culture. Before the Interim Constitution of 1994, there was no bill of rights and parliamentary supremacy made it nearly impossible to overturn unjust laws. If South Africa was successfully to make the transition from racial oligarchy to multi-racial democracy with majority and minority rights protected, a culture of rights was sorely needed.

According to Boraine, the TRC would help create this culture of rights by showing that all persons, be they exalted or lowly, were equal in the eyes of the law. Sequential chapters in his memoir show clearly the difficulties of such a task. Chapter 6, ‘A Season of Madness: P. W. Botha’, details the complex mechanisms by which the former state president managed to avoid telling the truth before the committee, finally getting off on a legal technicality. The next chapter, ‘A South African tragedy: Winnie Madikizela-Mandela’, tells a strikingly similar tale of how Ms Madikizela-Mandela also managed to avoid both telling the truth and the accountability that was supposed to come with that honesty.

Boraine notes the parallels saying, ‘Neither responded with genuine remorse. Both continue to claim that they were right and without fault. At opposite poles, repressor and repressed, they sum up the sickness of the soul of South Africa during the years of racial conflict’ (p. 257). Nonetheless, Boraine seems satisfied with the outcome. It might be suggested however, that if the powerful can escape accountability and only the small cogs, the powerless, are forced to tell their tales of evil and take responsibility for them, the effectiveness of the whole process is diminished. It will take more than this to establish a culture of rights in South Africa.

Not everyone would agree with Boraine’s generous assessment of the Commission’s success. However, anyone interested in South Africa’s effort to come to grips with its past in a productive manner via the TRC will find this book provides valuable insights into the commission and the multiplicity of dilemmas it faced. A Country Unmasked is an important document. Those concerned for South Africa and the example it holds for the world can only hope that Alex Boraine is right when he concludes, ‘Despite the legacy of the past, the real divisions which still prevail, we can make it’ (p. 442).

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‘Social construction of interpretation, representation and understanding’ would have been an appropriate subtitle to this book. The ‘politics of representation’ are the heart of the matter, with contributions from several Western Africa specialists on the theme of the (re)production and social construction of nature and poverty in Africa. Examples and analyses from different spots in Africa are given about how, in earlier colonial days and (sometimes) continuing in the present, African realities in the related fields of nature and poverty (i.e. conservation and development policies), were and are often represented in erroneous ways by colonial administrators, scientists and practitioners in the field of conservation and development. For instance, James Fairhead and Melissa Leach, in their contribution, argue that representations of forest cover change in West Africa are highly exaggerated in terms of actual loss of forests. Nevertheless this particular representation guided conservation policies and interventions, which were meant to counter the imagined loss of forest cover. It resulted in restrictive policies, ‘draconian’ in their words (p. 194), for the local populations who, more or less as usual I would say, in the end had to bear the actual burden of this misinterpretation.

Similar story lines can be recognised in other contributions, where conservation policies are also the primary focus, about cases in other countries and regions in Africa. Examples are (re)presented from Mali (Tor Benjaminsen), Nigeria (Reginald Cline-Cole), Tanzania (Nina Johnson), Equatorial Africa (Tamara Giles-Vernick) and a regional approach in Roderick Neumann’s chapter. The same refrain can also be read in contributions which focus more on conservation in relation to economic development (policies). In Sudan, for instance, as Cindi Katz argues, the destruction of nature, through the cutting of trees in the south by woodcutters from the Islamic north, produces poverty in the South which serves, and is actively propagated by, the Islamic government in Khartoum: it supplies fuel wood to the growing urban populations, while at the same time it removes the hiding places for southern guerrilla fighters; ‘wood cutting has become an accessory of war’ (p. 337). Other contributions with a focus on economic development describe cases in Zanzibar (Kjersti Larsen), Tanzania (Wilhelm Østberg), and The Gambia (Richard Schroeder).

The basic assumption of the book is that misinterpretations of the kind described above hamper economic and social justice and therefore should be constantly countered and corrected by critical researchers. Going together with this basic assumption, but remaining rather implicit in most of the texts, is the moral conviction of the authors, which is taken as a starting point: they are not solely critically evaluating (historic) representations for the sake of getting closer to the truth (whatever that may be!), but they are, and may be even primarily, critical for the sake of solidarity with and giving voice to the grass roots level poor in Africa. With their critical evaluations of the effects of
contemporary policy changes, the different authors are after ‘the best opportunities for promoting economic and social justice’ as Schroeder writes in the concluding lines of the book (p. 347). This is not uncommon practice among Africa specialists from the Western world (there are no African contributions to this book). But in line with the central theme of this book, the politics and social construction of interpretation, representation and understanding, it might be wondered how this particular basic assumption has influenced the specific representations of the authors themselves? By deconstructing the myths in terms of misinterpretation of others, they might as well produce and (re)construct their own myths. A more explicit critical reflection on their own ‘mode of interpretation’ would have been useful in this respect.

Broch-Due and Schroeder’s book is a welcome, well-researched and well-written critical contribution to the literature on conservation and development policies in Africa. Furthermore, it helps to demythologise some of the ‘received wisdom’ on nature and poverty in Africa. However, it lacks a self-critical reflection on its own potential to mythologise, inherent in the (mostly) implicit moral basic assumption from which the book is written.

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Mozambique: the tortuous road to democracy by João Cabrita


The Tortuous Road to Democracy narrates in some detail the development of war in Mozambique. As such, it should be treated carefully: all accounts of war in Mozambique necessarily engage with polemics over the meaning of the war, based around the relative culpability of the Frelimo government and the Renamo insurgency. Cabrita clearly writes within the ‘revisionist’ tradition: refuting the view that Frelimo faced an illegitimate insurgency strongly dominated by apartheid South Africa, highlighting Renamo’s Mozambican roots, and arguing that much of our understanding of the war has been distorted through Frelimo’s astute manipulation of the media and the diplomatic community.

There are some problems with the book that derive from the author’s approach in this respect. Most obviously, the author does not engage with the arguments and evidence concerning Renamo’s human rights record—a concern not just of ‘solidarity’ academics wishing to support Frelimo’s ‘socialism’, but also of less ideologically driven researchers and reports by NGO workers. That this is a bias rather than a lacuna in research sourcing is revealed by the detail given to Frelimo human rights abuses (most of which are entirely credible). The book does recognise Renamo’s long history of external backing—in fact it adds some useful detail to this aspect of the war—but there is no mention of destabilisation, the catch-all phrase to describe the ways in which Renamo served as the means to achieve the besieged
apartheid state’s regional Total Strategy in Mozambique. As a result, South African support appears almost contingent, materially helpful but not systemic, politicised, and integrated into a regional war waged from Pretoria.

If one is aware of the pitfalls involved in reading any account of war in Mozambique, one can recognise that the book has its strengths. It is not the analytically weak polemic of David Hoile. The author uses original sources – declassified US State documentation, and a wide range of interviews – to give original insight into the political intrigue that raged behind the scenes of both protagonists. The book reminds the reader of Vines’ definitive book *RENAMO: Terrorism in Mozambique* (1991), prime place is given to key personalities, their own strategies to maintain power, and the highly variable fortunes that they confront in the world of plots, international flights, meetings and cabals. For some, this will limit the book’s ability to analyse the conflict’s political economy and its structuration in culture and contending forms of power. The sources are also selective: the interest in declassified documents from the US gives the United States a preponderant rôle in Frelimo’s early years which could be tempered by references to others’ research into the social origins of an ascendant group within Frelimo outside its constituting diasporic parties (for example de Brito, ‘Une relecture nécessaire’ in *Politique Africaine* 29, 1988). Some interviewees are taken at their word, despite the well-known rumour-mongering in South Africa and Lisbon throughout the war.

The book ends as the peace process begins, at around 1992. This is a period which is very revealing, especially in understanding Renamo. There is a brief epilogue but this merely extends a sketchy critique of Frelimo into the present day. This leaves the reader with a strong impression that underlies the whole book, that some careful and original research has been undermined by a systemic bias towards Renamo which distracts the ‘Mozambicanist’ reader and might mislead those looking for an introduction to Mozambique.

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**Angola: from Afro-Stalinism to petro-diamond capitalism** by Tony Hodges


Despite its laborious title, this excellent study by Tony Hodges must rank as one of the best on Angola in many years. Hodges is an acknowledged Angolan expert and has written extensively on the country. He first visited Angola in 1975 and worked there for United Nations agencies from 1994 to 1998. His is an insider’s account in a number of ways, benefiting from a series of studies by the IMF, World Bank and other agencies. ‘Angola presents a terrible,
shocking paradox,’ Hodges explains in the introduction. ‘Few countries present such a stark contrast between economic potential and the state of their populace.’ His book explains why in a logical, succinct and accessible manner.

Hodges largely avoids the deterministic generalisations of the theories on the economic agendas of civil wars that World Bank analysts have popularised in recent years. Although primarily an economic-political analysis, he presents a convincing and detailed case study of Angola that ties in social, humanitarian and regional considerations with a comprehensive interpretation and investigation of recent Angolan economic history and current status. Apart from a short introduction and conclusion, successive chapters provide: an overview of the last four decades of war and upheaval; the associated social changes that have transformed the country during the same period; the nature of the Angolan state and its relationship with civil society; the nature of the economic crisis; the nature of the oil industry – designated as part of a ‘Bermuda Triangle’ where accountability, oversight and money disappear; and finally how access to the diamond resources in the north-east enables UNITA to sustain its capacity for war-making and how diamond concessions have become a key mechanism in patronage for the ruling elite. Throughout the book is richly complemented by graphs, maps and tables, including some 13 pages of statistical data included as an appendix. The combination of sober prose and analytical data in an accessible form provides a depth of analysis and rigour and makes for a compact study.

Perhaps the only weakness of this truly comprehensive and remarkable study is that it succumbs in part to the recent international tendency to gloss over the colonial, ethnic and historical roots of African struggles in favour of economic considerations of greed – pointing to the extent to which the key causal factors have changed over time and historical motivations have waned. Therefore ‘the war has neither a real social basis, even in terms of ethnicity … it is a war driven by personal ambition, mutual suspicion and the prize of winning or retaining control over the state and the resources to which it gives access’ (p. 18). This is not a view shared by all and although not central to the book, it does distract a reader aware of the extent to which issues of class, race and ethnicity underpin the Angolan conflict to this day.

Angola presents a paradox of immense mineral-based wealth and development potential coexisting with economic collapse, social dissolution, poverty and tragedy. It is a country of heart-breaking suffering and exploitation that demands the attention of the international diplomatic community in consort with the international business community if there is to be an end to the conflict. This book by Hodges is crucial reading for anyone wishing to understand the war, its motivation and characteristics, and is highly recommended for all interested in understanding the nature of African conflicts.

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Ambiguous Order: military forces in African States by Herbert M. Howe

This book is a commendable effort to understand the current ills affecting Sub-Saharan Africa. Howe looks specifically at how the military forces should place themselves so as to contribute in shaping an orderly, peaceful, safe and secure Africa. In analysing the changing security patterns, Howe notes, first, that in the post-Cold War era, Sub-Saharan Africa is characterised by endemic conflicts with an endless list of causes. Secondly, that while one would have expected the military forces to be the agents for order and guarantors of peace, they have instead often been unprofessional and, together with insurgencies, have become part of a vicious circle of violence and disorder. And, thirdly, that in the course of these conflicts there has been a shift in the balance of power from the state security forces towards insurgencies.

Furthermore, he argues that the loss of super-power support for many undemocratic regimes at the end of the Cold War came at time when their rule was under increasing opposition from disaffected groups. As a result, many rulers turned to parochial and exclusive identity groups, such as ethnicity, for support. In the process the state military forces suffered as rulers emphasised loyalty of the military to the regime at the expense of capabilities.

Then Howe looks at three alternative solutions to bring peace to Africa. Regional interventions (e.g. ECOMOG), Private Security Companies (e.g. Executive Outcomes), and the American sponsored African Crisis Response Initiative (ACRI) are discussed. He assesses the professionalism of all these forces and details their strengths and weaknesses. While which of these alternatives he specifically recommends is not quite clear, his preferences are based on professionalism.

That said, though, two main weaknesses of the book should be spelled out. First is that although Howe uses the analogy that ‘a weak tree does not produce strong branches’ in relation to ECOWAS and ECOMOG, he fails to extend this to its logical conclusion that weak/failed states cannot produce professional (strong) militaries. In fact what Howe calls causes of the non-professional profile of African military forces are symptoms of a bigger epidemic – the lack or weakness of the very social contract under which the military is supposed to serve. In other words, if the social contract is non-existent or weak, then the different institutions tasked to perform certain functions towards the attainment of the ‘common good’ will have no guidance. This leads to the underlined instances where regimes prefer a weak military that is loyal to the regime, rather than a professional, capable military that serves the State. This is critical point, for while the debate on professionalisation of the military, inherent in the current popular discourse on security sector reform, is important, it is carried out under the broader context of rehabilitating the state.

The second weakness is related to the fact that Howe seems to believe that professional military forces alone can solve the African crisis. This leads him
to focus on the potential models of ECOMOG, EO or ACRI. However, whilst an important issue to examine, Howe does this narrowly and does not sufficiently consider other substantial measures required to address insecurity and disorder in Africa. Military forces by nature deal with symptoms, and the root causes have to be politically addressed.

**Martinho Chachiua**

_Saferworld_

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**Global Thinking and Local Action: agriculture, tropical forest loss and conservation in southeast Nigeria** by Uwem E. Ite


This is a useful discussion of small farmer contribution to, and interrogation of, tropical moist forest (TMF) loss and conservation in and around Nigeria’s Cross River National Park (CRNP), ‘without doubt … the largest, most diverse protected area in West Africa’ (p. 44). The CRNP is adjacent to, and in part contiguous with, Cameroon’s older and much higher-profile Korup National Park, which appears to have provided some inspiration for the former’s establishment. Ite’s main aim is to demonstrate ‘that an understanding of smallholder forest farmers and their role in [TMF] loss is vital to attempts to conserve TMF environments in developing countries’ (p. 12). He does this through a focus on what he calls ‘the local realities of [TMF] loss and conservation in Okwangwo Division of the Cross River National Park project [CRNPP]’ (p. 53), the location of a conservation-with-development initiative designed to achieve both a ‘conservation goal of maintaining a globally important ecological area intact’ and a ‘development goal of improving the economic and social welfare’ of the local population (p. 51).

Thus fully half of the book is devoted to these ‘local realities’, including the role of environmental dynamism, which are explored in some detail, along with their associated socio-spatial and temporal variability. Regrettably, given the relevance of factors like ethnicity, indigeneity, kinship and primogeniture for questions of local and regional livelihood access, diversity, security and sustainability, much of this material is descriptive and/or summarised in household and village aggregates, rather than being analysed in a sustained and differentiated manner. To my mind, this raises important unanswered questions: how, for example, do the livelihood realities and production characteristics in question vary along parameters of differentiation like age, gender, marital status, education, length of residence, etc. within individual villages as well as between households? Or, indeed, what role do intra-household dynamics and differences play in any (or all) of this?

Significantly, however, Ite situates this household and village case study within the wider context of changing (mostly Northern) debates on the nature and dynamics of forest-based livelihoods, and the latter’s implications for TMF conservation-in-practice. There is here, then, clear recognition that the processes at work transcend links between the various arms of the Nigerian state and the localities which attract detailed research attention. Such
contextualisation makes perfect sense. The CRNPP is ‘a direct manifestation and transformation of global thinking on TMF conservation into local practice and action’ (p. 53). Yet this is wisely not interpreted as implying a simple ‘localisation’ of the ‘global’: a wide range of interests at scales intermediate between these two extremes are and were also implicated. Indeed, as Ite perceptively observes, while there is ‘no doubt that international conservation interest groups orchestrated the establishment of the Okwango Division ... it could be argued that the park project was designed in response to the conflicting, divergent needs and demands of conservationists, international development agencies as well as those of the Federal and Cross River State governments and the local communities’ (p. 53).

Not surprisingly, this compact volume’s organising framework (an overview of global theoretical thinking on forest loss and conservation serving as a prelude to a local-level analysis of forest livelihoods and conservation interventions which is, in turn, followed by a synthesis of ‘local realities’ and ‘global illusions’), as well as its key integrating message (there is a continuing need for an increasing range of contextual analyses of TMF loss which both focus on local household dynamics and processes, and facilitate a much clearer articulation of small-farmer participation in TMF conservation design and management), contain unmistakable suggestions of a keen appreciation of broad nature-society concerns, as indeed does the first part of the book’s title, Global Thinking and Local Action. It is for this reason that, to my mind at least, and maybe somewhat paradoxically, this book’s greatest value lies less in the specifics of the case study (despite its value in undermining the ‘speculative notions and perceptions of very high rates of forest and biodiversity loss in Nigeria and Cross River State’ (p. 93), which had been used to justify the establishment of the CRNPP in the first place), than in the opportunity it offers for much wider reflection: on the complex nature of global–local environment–development ‘exchange’; on the frequently bewildering dynamics of nature–society relations; and, finally, on the significance of geographic scale (particularly the socio-spatial implications of its construction, negotiation and contestation) for an understanding of these interlinked themes and concerns. In the final analysis, Ite is clearly preoccupied with how to combine the (re)production of nature with a reduction in poverty.

This book is thus a valuable addition to a growing corpus which includes Rosaleen Duffy’s Killing for Conservation: wildlife policy in Zimbabwe (James Currey 2000), Global Restructuring and Land Rights in Ghana: forest food chains, timber and rural livelihoods (Kojo Amanor, Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1999), Producing Nature and Poverty in Africa (Vigdis Broch-Due & Richard Schroeder, eds., Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2000), and Rod Neumann’s Imposing wilderness: Struggles over livelihood and nature preservation in Africa (University of California Press, 1998), among others.

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Property Rights and Political Development in Ethiopia and Eritrea, 1941–1974 by Sandra Fullerton Joireman

Sandra Fullerton Joireman has written an interesting and irritating book. Irritating not because of its challengeable yet interesting theoretical argument, but because of several simplifications and errors she repeats from authors who again repeated them after others. Not knowing much about tropical agriculture, about enset or Ethiopian coffee, may be permissible. From a book on, say, the economy or tourism, one might accept a statement that Emperor Menilek in the nineteenth century conquered, disowned and enserfed the peasants in the Ethiopian south. A book on land rights could be expected to give the issue a bit more historical scrutiny, not to contribute to half- (or less) truths becoming accepted knowledge just through repetition.

Comparing three regions in post-war Imperial Ethiopia with different historical backgrounds and different changes in land tenure regimes during this period, the book challenges conventional theories on property rights. An evolutionary model assumes that any change would be ‘in the direction of greater specification, culminating in the strictest definition of individual rights, private property’ (p. 18). Analysing court records on cases related to land transfers during the period 1941 to 1974, the book tries to identify factors affecting the property regimes in practice. Joireman suggests to modify the theory, by an observation that state intervention or the influence of strong interest groups can induce changes to less specific property regimes, such as collective ownership of land. Her historical analysis allows Joireman to identify several such changes towards collective regimes: in Eritrea, where the Italians introduced a common land tenure for the indigenous farm population, and in Northern Shoa, where the powerful resistance of the local nobility prevented Haile Selassie’s reforms. Then, in the 1975 land reform, the revolutionary regime introduced a common property regime for the peasants in Sidamo and Northern Shoa (and other areas in Ethiopia).

Indeed, the theory of growing specificity, and its implicit assumption of specificity equalling private property, needs criticism and differentiation, in view of concrete cases and in different local contexts. This concept assumes a historical teleology which has been scrapped in many other contexts. Private property is not necessarily the most specific nor the most advanced or correct or progressive regime for efficient resource management. The Abyssinian rist system was in a way more specific than private property: it defined exactly who owned which rights related to land. But it spread these rights over several individuals and groups of people, while private property collects most (not necessarily all!) of these rights in one hand and individualises them. In Ethiopia, furthermore, the most important social function of agriculture is not to be efficient in earning revenues. It is to feed the subsistence population, and it will continue so for the foreseeable future. Joireman talks about this need to consider differences in societies where the overwhelming majority of people
have no economic alternative to agriculture for feeding themselves, and hence need access to land. But in the course of the study, she seems to be carried away by the persuasiveness of the argument of higher productivity. Still, she manages to collect an impressive body of information on agriculture and on property regimes on Ethiopia, court cases, historical material and individual interviews.

For this alone the book is well worth reading; with care, though, and a good portion of independent knowledge, for it contains several mistakes, wrong understandings, inexactnesses when it comes to detail as well as interpretation. The history of land tenure is little known in Ethiopia, and much misinformation is difficult to eliminate, because one author repeats it after another, and anyway, the first generation born in town is usually least critical when it comes to generalisations about the backwardness of rural areas. Joireman repeats some and herself adds others, which might, alas, also become truths by repetition.

A short review cannot arrest all the small errors and misinterpretations. It can only show one or two examples of consequence for a historical understanding of social facts. For example, Joireman repeats after other authors that the 1975 Rural Lands Proclamation ‘vested all ownership of land in the government and put government control in the hands of local peasant associations’ (p. 2). In fact, the Proclamation stated that ‘all rural land shall be the collective property of the Ethiopian people’. Only in the later period of the Derg regime, was parliament made to amend the law, changing the word people into state. The difference is significant indeed, in an Ethiopian context. As Joireman rightly observes, ‘the shift in property rights that occurred in post-revolutionary Ethiopia was a result of an ideological agenda rather than an alteration in factor prices, or a state seeking to maximize its own revenue’ (p. 23). But the Derg revived the central state after 1977, and re-defined both its goals and the law. It brought land back under the control of the state, for two purposes: increased revenue and increased control over peasants through controlling their access to land.

In one of the more serious misinterpretations, Joireman maintains that in Sidamo the nobility competed with the peasants for land ownership. In fact, they competed for different rights attached to land. The peasants were interested in rist, that is, an inheritable usufruct right, while the nobility was interested in gult, which is a right to a part of the produce of the land, or riste-gult, which is an inheritable gult. In Menilek’s conquest the peasants remained on their land and kept all their inherited rights. The noble recipients of land grants were not interested in tilling it themselves, they depended on peasants on their land, and invited settlers where there were none. But the peasants had to pay higher contributions. Nor were they enserfed, as Joireman claims, with reference to one Italian document. The historian Pankhurst has studied this aspect and concluded that there were attempts to forcefully return deserting peasants, but that the rule never worked and was soon abandoned. But few peasants did leave: for where could they go?

Only when Haile Selassie introduced freehold in the 1950s, and vested a new nobility with land rights in the South, did he indeed disown the peasants’ rights. But the peasants were never told. Only when a new landowner evicted them and they went to court, did they learn that the law had been changed.
Whoever had paid the tax for the last five years was now to be considered the exclusive owner. As the nobility usually collected the contributions in kind and paid tax in cash for their entire area, the peasants had been disowned (much as they were disowned in France under Louis XIV or in East Prussia under Bismarck).

This process is the background for the 'land to the tiller’ demonstrations of the 1960s and 1970s. Without understanding such details properly, how can one judge what is moving from general to specific in property regimes? How can one interpret historical court cases? If land is not understood as a commodity, but as a resource to which everybody needs access, sales of land may mean different forms of access, permanent or temporary, rather than ownership.

Even peasant interests in land are not easy to define. When Yeraswork Admasie interviewed peasants in Northern Wollo in 1993, their almost unanimous preference was private property in land. I happened to travel through the same area about the same time, and asked rural people. A large majority of them said: We need first of all a redistribution of land – not private property. Who was right? Both. The sample was different: Yeraswork asked established peasants, I had asked people I met by accident, those who had time to walk around, returnees from settlements, landless people. Naturally they wanted a redistribution to get access to land. Secure access is the peasant’s first priority.

The present government knows this. It has declared the peasants to be main support base. To make sure they do not vote for opposition candidates, they are told that the ‘land is not for the opposition’ and ‘The constitution says the land is the property of the government. We do not give our land to those who betray us …’

This is the significance of the distinction between the property of the state and the property of the people. This is African reality today. To study property regimes without taking such consequences for the individual peasant into account, may easily become an academic exercise far removed from the reality in rural Africa.

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War and Slavery in Sudan by Jok Madut Jok

Jok Madut rightly points out that the phenomenon of contemporary slavery in Sudan has received inadequate scholarly attention. But it has acquired a degree of exposure in the international media that is quite exceptional, and it has been propelled to near the top of the US administration’s foreign policy agenda. The question of slavery has been in the spotlight, placed there by some well-funded, well-connected and very determined Christian organisa-
tions, which have spent millions of dollars ‘redeeming’ tens of thousands of alleged slaves. These agencies – most of them American, right-wing and fundamentalist – have tapped into both the profound Southern Sudanese sense of grievance and abandonment, and the financial and political opportunities unleashed by an issue that uniquely unites the Congressional black caucus, the religious right, and (more discreetly) the Jewish lobby (because of the anti-Arab component). What other African issue has Colorado schoolchildren forwarding their lunch money?

The information generated by journalists, human rights organisations, and relief agencies is very uneven in quality, and there are some major black holes – among them, notably, the question of what is happening to the thousands of women and children abducted from the Dinka communities of Bahr el Ghazal by the ‘murahaliin’ militia raiders of southern Darfur and southern Kordofan. Enough is known for an informed investigator to be able to piece together a fairly reliable picture of what is really happening behind the highly politicised and polarised pictures painted by the slave redemption campaigners on the one hand, and the Sudan government on the other. Five years ago, best estimates for the number of abducted and enslaved Southerners were 6–10,000. But, since then, slave redemption programmes have bought back more than 20,000 at $50 apiece, and the funds continue to roll in.

Jok Madut is extremely well placed to document and analyse the inter-related phenomena of entrenched racism in Sudanese society, the history of servitude, the resurgence of raiding and enslavement associated with the civil war, and distress migration and highly exploitative labour relations also linked to the war. As an anthropologist from the affected area, he is able to penetrate behind the ideologically coloured and self-serving claims and counter-claims. In this book, he takes some steps. But much of his analysis is the grievance approach to marshalling knowledge.

This is not exactly an impartial account. The author makes no secret of his sympathy for the Dinka and the SPLA. However it is unfortunate that he underplays the capacity of the SPLA to achieve major military victories and thereby generate real fear in the north. One of the sparks for the organisation of the militia forces responsible for raiding and enslavement was an SPLA raid at el Gardud in Kordofan in 1985, in which it killed more than 100 Baggara herders and their families.

Jok Madut’s major problem is his use and non-use of sources. On the question of numbers of slaves, he cites numbers that have been commonly used and re-used over the years, without investigating their provenance. This is unfortunate, as most of these numbers have been generated by journalists using back-of-the-envelope calculations, and have acquired a spurious respectability over time. The more useful numbers, generated by the Dinka chief committees in Khartoum and Darfur, based on village-by-village inquiries, which distinguish between slaves, displaced persons, abandoned or lost children and other categories, are neither documented nor analysed here. Nor does he inquire into the difference between the ‘market price’ of a human being as a commodity and the fee or ‘compensation’ paid by a family member to redeem an individual held in captivity. As a result, Jok Madut makes strong claims about the functioning of slave markets (p. 2, unanalysed), the role of
slave labour in the Baggara economy (pp. 145ff., unsourced), but also notes that ‘many Baggara raiders are said not to care much for slaves’ (p. 57), with the clear implication that capturing human beings is a by-product of the raiding, not its main purpose. In south-western Sudan, chattel slavery exists as the innermost of a set of concentric circles of exploitative relationships marked by coerced labour, racism, violence, poverty (of both ‘owner’ and slave) and sexual abuse. The author misses an opportunity for unpacking this.

Similarly, Jok Madut sets up a straw man when he accuses international agencies and various writers of attributing slavery to war. He rightly points to persisting racism and the continuum of precolonial, colonial and contemporary labour relations in Sudan. But no writers have seriously disputed these facts: to write that ‘the relationship between race and the institution of slavery has been neglected in the study of slavery within Africa’ (p. 57) is simply wrong. This very issue has been the focus of important anthropological research within northern Sudan (e.g. Ahmed al Shahi’s writing on the Shaigiya of Nuri, Mark Duffield on the Fellata of Mai Wurno), which Jok does not acknowledge. Similarly, his account of the demarcation of the north–south internal border in Sudan (p. 15) is incorrect: the present line that separates the Dinka and Baggara along the Kīr/Bahr el Arab river dates to negotiations between the British district commissioners in the 1920s, not to the post-independence government.

These errors and omissions are unfortunate because Jok Madut has many real insights to add. For example, his account of the use of slaves to initiate Arab boys into sex (p. 36) deserves more elaboration. When the author shifts from advocacy mode to analysis, he makes a scholarly contribution. More widely, he has added a welcome Sudanese voice to the debate on slavery in his country.

ALEX DE WAAL

Justice Africa

The Challenge of Institutionalizing Civilian Control: Botswana, Ivory Coast, and Kenya in comparative perspective by Boubacar N’diaye


From the 1960s through to the 1980s, academic study of the involvement of the military in African politics was focused primarily on the causes of intervention. Strategies for institutionalising civilian control of the military were hardly the explicit focus of research. The assumption was that an understanding of the causes of coups was essential for devising policies that would prevent intervention, just as in medicine where the cause of an illness has to be diagnosed for effective prescription to be made. Yet, the cycle of coups continued as the literature on the subject grew to encompass a gamut of explanations.

In his newly published book, Boubacar N’diaye reviews various studies on intervention and dismisses them as ‘lacking in historical perspective’, and not
offering a ‘convincing explanatory theory of the causes of coups’ (pp. 22, 50). Consequently, he focuses on strategies that are most likely to ensure long-term civilian control. This focus is consistent with contemporary studies on civil–military relations whose main thrust is the containment of the military following the third wave of democratisation that swept Africa. However, while present-day studies are on strategies for subordinating the military to elected governments, Boubacar’s work is an impact assessment of coup preventing strategies of the states that never experienced military takeovers.

Boubacar presents eighteen countries in Africa as having been free of coups, and three – Botswana, Côte d’Ivoire, and Kenya – are used as case studies. According to him, each of these three countries pursued strategies that were significantly different from each other but representative of the types of control employed by the coup-free countries. Drawing on some of the works of Huntington (1996), Goldsworthy (1981, 1986), Decalo (1989, 1991) and Patcher (1982), he identified Botswana as having pursued a ‘legitimating policy option’ that comprised strategies ranging from good governance to professionalisation and political insulation of the military (pp. 72–91).

Côte d’Ivoire is said to have gone for an ‘external guarantor option’ that required the presence of French troops, the appointment of expatriate officers to important military positions, co-opting the top military brass, and manipulating the ethnic composition of the army (pp. 59, 102–9). Kenya is identified as having adopted a payoff policy that embraced strategies that range from lavish benefits and lucrative government positions to prestige enhancement.

Readers will find it curious that Côte d’Ivoire is used as a case study despite the author’s acknowledgement of the 1999 coup. Guinea that endured until after the death of Sekou Toure in 1984 is grouped among the coup states, but Côte d’Ivoire is listed among the eighteen coup-free countries and is used as a case study. Readers may also notice that the three case studies are not truly representative, as the control strategies of the former leftist states of Angola and Mozambique are not accounted for. His argument that internal civil wars account for the absence of coups in these countries is hardly persuasive, when considered that Sudan has been locked in civil war but has not been free of coups.

The centrepiece of the book is the evaluation of the control strategies of the three sample countries (chapters 4–6). Boubacar finds Botswana’s policies to have legitimised the country’s regimes in the eyes of citizens and the military. This in turn is said to have significantly reduced the country’s coup vulnerability. In contrast, the differing policies of Côte d’Ivoire and Kenya are found to have been successful in preventing coups in the short run, but increased long-term vulnerability to intervention. However, a problem arises over the criteria that Boubacar uses in evaluating the three countries. In chapter 1 he presents military professionalisation, military autonomy and government legitimacy as the standard for assessment, some of these being derived from the theoretical arguments of Huntington. However, a reading of chapter 5 reveals these criteria to be Botswana’s strategies for institutionalising civilian control. So, the author seems to have used Botswana as a standard for evaluating the coup vulnerability of the other countries.
In the final chapter the author relates the importance of his findings to the emerging democracies in the continent by noting that Côte d'Ivoire and Kenya present a good example of ‘what not to do’ if civilian control is to be institutionalised (p. 153). On the other hand, Botswana’s legitimating policies are presented as worthy of emulation by the new democracies. The most important contribution of the work, then, is that elected civilian regimes have to adhere to democratic norms and standards if they are to maintain control over their militaries.

Overall, the book is well researched and the author has done a good job admitting historical evidence to back his arguments. His presentation of the taxonomy of causes of coups is very impressive. Particularly praiseworthy is the organisational clarity of the work and the pains Boubacar takes at every turn to explain how each chapter fits with the rest of work. But one must note that the cloth edition is a bit pricey for individuals to purchase and a cheaper paperback edition may have to be printed.

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African Spirituality: forms, meanings and expressions edited by JACOB K. OLUPTONA

This volume, which comprises Volume 3 of World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest, contains twenty entries from scholars of African religions, which the editor, Jacob Olupona, has divided into four categories: ‘cosmologies and sacred knowledge’; ‘authority, agencies, and performance’; ‘Africans’ encounter with other religions’; and ‘African spirituality in the Americas’. In addition, the editor has written a most helpful introduction to the articles, and the book contains a Foreword by Charles Long, who has a distinguished career in Religious Studies and African-American Studies.

The fact that this volume appears in a World Spirituality series is significant in itself, since African religions, which for too long have been classified in academic circles under various rubrics, such as primitive, primal, traditional or tribal, are rightly acknowledged as a part of what Ewert Cousins, general editor of the series, calls ‘the spiritual wisdom of the human race in its historical unfolding’. Indeed, in his Introduction, Jacob Olupona underscores this point by arguing that Westerners have long assumed ‘an absence of spirituality’ in Africa. This volume attempts to correct this misconception, in Olupona’s words, by focusing on ‘many elements of Africans’ spiritual and cultural heritage’ that puzzle both ‘foreigners’ resident in Africa and more broadly ‘the global community’.

Despite Olupona’s stated aim to correct prior misconceptions of African religions, by beginning with a section on cosmologies, he has given primary attention to the Western preoccupation with systems or world-views, which is
not far removed from starting with the first principle, God, as is done in theological texts. The initial contribution in this section by Dominique Zahan focuses specifically on concerns central to Westerners, such as the nature and role of the Supreme Being, concepts of sin and redemption, prayers and priests and, eventually, the roles assigned to ancestors and other spirits. This may have been intended to create a point of contact between the subject matter and a Western readership, but its place in the book and its contents do little to disarm Western hegemony in determining the way African religions are conceived and presented in academic circles. The other three articles in Part II are much more culturally specific. Benjamin Ray, for example, provides a detailed study of shrines among a wide selection of African peoples as a means of identifying how ritual space facilitates vital commerce with the spirit world. Ogbu Kalu quite helpfully provides a detailed case study of ancestors among the Igbo of southern Nigeria and how the place of ancestors has been affected in the contemporary situation by outside forces, principally Christianity. The Igbo also provide the content for the article by Sabine Jell-Bahlsen on the role of the lake goddess Uhammiri/Ogbuide. Although it would have been easy for the author to have couched her presentation in terms of Western feminist discourse, she avoids this and makes the case for a feminine cosmology among the Igbo convincingly through her phenomenological account of a central female water spirit.

Part II, which concentrates on various agents of spirituality, in this reviewer’s opinion, is much better conceived than Part I. In this section, the reader confronts a wide selection of studies describing how African societies encounter the spiritual world, such as mechanical modes of divination (Umar Danfulani’s excellent account of Pa divination on the Jos Plateau of Nigeria); kingship as spiritual authority among the Edo of Nigeria (Flora Edouwaye S. Kaplan’s survey based on historical records and contemporary accounts, including a series of excellent photographs with useful explanations); spiritual sources of misfortune and affliction (David Westerlund on causes of illness and Michael Bourdillon on witchcraft); the accommodation of traditional African water spirits to influences from Europe, the Americas and India through the Mami Water cultural phenomenon (in another very useful piece by Kathleen O’Brien Wicker, also nicely illustrated with photographs); and the place of art in African spirituality (in an exhaustive survey by Wyatt MacGaffey followed by a full and extremely useful bibliography). It is not entirely clear why Part II concludes with an overview of the culture and religion of the Dagbamba of northern Ghana by John Chernoff, since it might better have been placed among the articles on cosmologies, due to the author’s rather cursory treatment of Dagbamba beliefs about God, ancestors, divination, illness and the contemporary influence of Islam on traditional beliefs and practices.

Parts III and IV provide an excellent discussion of African spirituality both as an encounter with other religions and as a force for religious change in diaspora communities in the Americas. In a short article, G. C. Oosthuizen identifies what he calls the ‘Church’s dilemma’ in South Africa, created by missionary distortions of African spirituality, which in turn have sparked the rapid proliferation of African Initiated (Indigenous) Churches (AICs). Other studies in Part Three include three articles on Islam, one by Patrick Ryan on
African Muslim Spirituality from a West African perspective, one on Muslim youth movements in South Africa by the foremost authority on this subject, Abdulkader Tayob, and a comprehensive review of Sufism in Africa by Louis Brenner. Part Three concludes with two articles on Christianity in Africa, one a largely historical survey of early Christianity in Roman north Africa by Margaret Miles, which reminds us that Christian history is intricately connected to the African continent, and an essay by Pashington Obeng, who describes how Roman Catholicism in Ghana has been appropriated by African spirituality. Obeng’s contribution forces us to consider carefully what is meant by indigenous Christianity in Africa.

That the book concludes with a discussion of African religious influences in the Americas is entirely appropriate, since the vitality of African spirituality can be seen, for example, in Trinidad and Tobago through what Rudolph Eastman and Maureen Warner-Lewis call ‘African-based Religious Congregations’, such as devotion to orisha (Yoruba divinities), vodun (the name given to vodun in Trinidad) and the Spiritual Baptist Faith. An extremely interesting article is presented by Gerdes Fleurant on the music of Haiti vodun, which shows the central place of music in vodun ritual and has the secondary aim of studying vodun empathetically, or as Fleruant says, ‘on its own terms’. The final article in this formidable volume, by Mary Cuthrell-Curry, explores Yoruba religion (also called Santeria and Ocha) as it is practised by native-born African Americans.

It will be clear, even from this necessarily cursory review of the contributions to African Spirituality, that the book provides a rich resource for students of African religions. Despite its tendency in the first part to re-enforce dated apologetic approaches to African spirituality (it is as good as ours because it is like ours), the contents of the articles belie such an agenda. The reader finds in its pages detailed studies of specific African societies, set in historical and contemporary contexts, which provide opportunities for informed cross-cultural comparisons. In the end, the book attests, as Charles Long notes in his Foreword, to the central place occupied by African peoples ‘in the formation and sustenance of modern cultures in various parts of the globe’.

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The centenary of the Royal African Society (2001) gives Douglas Rimmer and Anthony Kirk-Greene, old stagers in the Africanist world, a date for a collaborative retrospective assessment of the British intellectual engagement with Africa. Kirk-Greene starts with a historical survey. First it was an engagement by amateurs. Academic research started during the interwar years. Then came the post-war ‘golden age’ of Africanists (as we now styled
ourselves). Government money was lavished on African Studies and African universities (chiefly staffed by British teachers) until the early 1970s when, with most of Africa safely decolonised, government and public lost interest and the funding dwindled, leaving the Africanists ageing and disconsolate.

David Killingray then surveys Colonial Studies. At first essentially ‘concerned with the policy and practice of ruling subject peoples’, it was subsumed in the ‘golden age’, usually with some disapproval, under African history. John Hargreaves reviews the story of decolonisation from its beginnings as a distant future possibility to the eventual political hand over – presented by some as gracious transfer, and by others as liberation struggle.

Christopher Clapham and Richard Hodder-Williams remind us that ‘politics’ is a postwar academic invention. First came the ‘Age of Innocence’ with proliferating studies of African nationalism, parties, political systems, which today gather dust on booksellers’ shelves – but also the foundation of The Journal of Modern African Studies by the indefatigable David Kimble who edited it for thirty-five years. Then disillusion set in. Differing brands of Marxists wrangled. British performers now tended to be upstaged by their French and American counterparts, leaving behind, the authors sadly conclude, only a ‘relatively modest legacy’.

Douglas Rimmer reminds us that development economics too appeared post-war, coupling welfare with economic development. Two main themes emerged – the need for capital investment and how to distribute its product. As it was assumed (though never proved) that investment must increase output, investment funds were poured out, at first optimistically, then mediated through structural adjustment. Meanwhile in Africa the poor grew poorer, the professionals were ruined and the rich grew richer. One is left wondering whether development economics should not follow Douglas Rimmer into retirement.

Michael Twaddle in ‘Historians and African History’ outlines the change from a Eurocentric to a more Afrocentric approach, quoting a 1965 survey by John Fage. Then follows an almost (to be frank) insultingly perfunctory paragraph on Roland Oliver who, more than anyone else, founded the study of African history in this country. Three pages from a pessimistic 1976 conference paper by Terence Ranger follow, then more pessimistic critique and a concluding diatribe on the ‘fragmentation’ of present-day historiography. No reader would guess that if there is one field where British Africanists have made an unquestionably original and impressive contribution it is African history.

It’s a relief to turn to Sandy Robertson’s enjoyable essay on African ethnography and social anthropology. Ethnography began with well-read gentlemen amateurs whose work was then scorned as unscientific by the social anthropologists – who themselves came to be scorned by the French for their lack of theory. Meanwhile historians fruitfully adopted the methods of ethnography. On ‘The Literary Engagement’, Alastair Niven illustrates how white British writers have persistently presented Africa in a hostile or contemptuous way. Only black British writers have turned there for inspiration, either directly or mediated through the Caribbean.
All these contributors soon returned to a home base. Lalage Bown, who writes on higher education in Africa, spent thirty years working, with tireless and affectionate commitment, in African universities. She too tells a familiar story. In the golden age universities were established as real centres of excellence. Then finances dried up, government politicised them, the World Bank spurned them as elitist, and today they are only kept going by the ‘indomitable spirit and commitment of a core of serious scholars’.

A. T. Grove too has spent many years in the field. Writing on the African environment, he shows how again and again the received wisdom of the past has done irrevocable damage. Now humbler and more self-critical, environmentalists are learning from these past lessons. It seems to me that this is about the only encouraging message to be drawn from the pages of this rather dismal volume.

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Women and Politics in Uganda by AILI MARI TRIPP

Uganda is internationally recognised for the exceptional achievements of its women. In just fifteen years they have gained a share in designing the constitution, a Parliament that is 24 per cent women (2001), fair representation on local councils, affirmative action for university entrance and a female vice president. Aili Tripp helps us understand that phenomenon as she traces the history of women’s political activism from pre-colonial through the colonial period, then concentrates on the years since 1986 when the National Resistance Movement (NRM) took power and women claimed and got a good deal of influence on policy. She credits success at national and local levels to the associational autonomy from local power structures, donors and, most important, the state, that has characterised the women’s movement over the years and to women’s turning their generations-long political marginalisation into a powerful tool.

Based on more than 1,000 survey responses and individual interviews combined with historical research, the well-written book moves easily through women’s mobilisation and societal autonomy across Africa, political and feminist theory, the history of Ugandan women’s rise to influence, the National Resistance Movement’s (NRM) openness to women and women’s responses, case studies of challenges by women’s groups to the status quo, and final conclusions, with plenty of descriptive detail and quotations.

Tripp tells well the tales of Kiyembe, Wakitaka, Kawaala and Kamuli women’s group challenges to authorities, to illustrate the deep-seated obstacles to their participation in community and public life. However, failure to reach group goals in three of the cases – control of a health clinic, ownership of market stalls and bringing openness to leadership of a rural NGO – and only
partial success in the fourth – a housing project – leave the reader wondering why some successful stories are not included. The NRM’s support of women is credited for initial opening of doors, although recent actions, such as the movement for land ownership, saw them back down. More attention to those systemic constraints women have to face, like acquiring empowering assets such as education as well as land ownership, would have enhanced the book.

Tripp posts warning signs for political analysts who readily accept decentralisation within their democracy theories when she shows, as in the Kiyembe and Kamuli studies, that creation of councils at all levels of society by no means eliminates patronage or age-old biases. Ugandan NGOs are painfully aware as they engage in education of newly selected leaders, that the election or appointment of persons from previously excluded class or gender groups does not automatically mean that the representatives’ decisions and actions will be support the groups from which they came.

This reviewer celebrates Tripp’s challenges to prevailing feminist theories such as Molyneux’ imposition of a dichotomy between strategic and practical actions by women, that belies the fact that actions categorised as practical are often deeply strategic. Illustrating inter-relationships between gender and class, she shows that women’s higher class status may not be accompanied by full empowerment. The importance of autonomous associations, not as marginalisers but as vehicles for women’s influence on local and national policy, is wisely emphasised at a time when, globally, the ideology of ‘mainstreaming’ has blurred scholars’ and activists’ understanding of the value and uses of female solidarity as a critical complementary approach. In this positive vein, one hopes that a subsequent volume will focus on the influence of Uganda’s women leaders, many of whom credit both service in the liberation army and meeting women activists from all over the world at the Nairobi United Nations conference on women, 1985, as having challenged them to activism.

Women and Politics in Uganda makes a very important contribution to the literature on development and on women’s empowerment, for its conceptual and analytical approaches and its wealth of information. It is also significant because when grants were flowing for research on women during the 1970s and early 1980s, Ugandans were engrossed not in writing but in surviving under oppressive political regimes.

This is a book for those seeking deeper knowledge of the Ugandan ‘miracle’ of GNP growth, a strong civil society and women’s empowerment. It should be read by persons interested in the capacities of civil society associations to effect change, in the gender dimensions of politics or in overcoming ethnic and religious sectarianism. Tripp’s historical perspectives on Ugandan women’s associations should draw others to continue and expand work in this field. Her characterisation of the contemporary women’s movement in the NRM era as autonomous and uniquely Ugandan ought to stimulate a good deal of comparison with other countries. The appendices, bibliography, charts, photographs and maps all enhance the quality of an excellent book.

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