

SHORTER NOTICE

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Studies in District Administration in the East Africa Protectorate (1895–1918). By T. H. R. CASHMORE. Cambridge: African Studies Centre, 2010. Pp. xiv + 254. No price given, no ISBN.

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The African Studies Centre at Cambridge has now made Dick Cashmore's 1965 PhD thesis generally available. This is a graceful bow to someone who, by ensuring that colonial files were not lost at Independence, was partly responsible for the formation of the Kenya National Archives. But it has also happened because, as John Lonsdale's indispensable introduction makes clear, Cashmore's thesis is still well worth reading, nearly fifty years later. Although more recent research – on the Giriama Rising, for example – has added much to his original work, his general conclusions have rarely been challenged and his often astute insights have stood the test of time. 'Native policy', such as it was, did indeed have 'an air of inconclusive groping', and the end of the First World War, which tested the local accommodations on which colonial authority rested almost to destruction, did mark Kenya's 'break with the past'. Moreover, the chapters on the administrators themselves and on the conflicts over the formulation of policy cover topics that have rarely been revisited.

Cashmore's main focus, through case studies of Maasailand, the Coast, and the Tana/Juba region, was on the construction of administration from the bottom up: how local officials acquired and delegated power and authority and how they sought, as a matter of both duty and necessity, to represent the views of 'their people' to government and to translate central directives into locally meaningful terms. Yet, for all their local prominence, the agency of district administrators was limited. Their 'chameleon'-like (Cashmore's word) posture, which enabled them to act as local intermediaries, also made them marginal in the wider colonial arena. Their voice was a 'protest voice', rather than a commanding one. Significantly, the studies are all of failure. The Maasai Moves were messy and controversial, the Somali barely under control, and the Coast an embarrassing and poorly administered backwater.

What makes Cashmore's work so valuable is not so much the local detail, fascinating though it is, as his dual perspective as Kenya administrator turned historian. As the one, he shared the 'worm's eye view' of his predecessors – and some of their assumptions, about the seemingly intractable conservatism of pastoralists, for example; as the other, he reflected critically on the work of his predecessors from the standpoint of a new generation of historians writing African history rather than the history of Europeans in Africa. While the thesis recalls that past, it also breaks with it.

By reproducing this foundational work, the African Studies Centre has performed a valuable service. However, it would have been more useful still had the Centre supplemented the copies of old administrative maps bound in the thesis with modern ones. More seriously, there is no cross-referencing apparatus to link the Kenya file references in the original footnotes to their modern equivalents. The holdings of the Kenya National Archives have since been re-catalogued more than once, and it is now difficult to trace the original system established *ad hoc* by Cashmore himself. Readers who wish to follow up some of his references, especially for subject files, will have a hard time.

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