

archives foncières pour mieux rendre compte de la sociogenèse de certains groupes. Brigitte Reinwald retrace également avec précision grâce à une quarantaine de récits de vie l'itinéraire d'anciens combattants du Burkina Faso. Leur insertion dans la ville de Bobo-Dioulasso passe par l'acquisition foncière, par la distinction sociale notamment vestimentaire, par l'ouverture et la gestion de bars et de cabarets, un ensemble de pratiques qui témoignent parfaitement des processus historiques d'individuation. Katrin Bromber propose une analyse plus textuelle des débats d'un journal swahili au début des années 1930 à propos du *buibui*, vêtement populaire porté par les citadines de la côte de l'Afrique de l'Est. *Le buibui* est un signe visible d'expression personnelle des femmes en tant que citadines musulmanes respectables mais il est tout autant un marqueur des tensions entre les Africains nouvellement convertis et les gens de la côte. Quant à la contribution de Philippe Denis sur l'histoire de Pietermaritzburg (Kwazulu-Natal en Afrique du Sud), elle présente un triple intérêt: elle est centrée sur une ville moyenne qui a beaucoup moins retenu l'attention des chercheurs que les grandes villes; elle associe en permanence l'histoire locale à l'histoire nationale; enfin et surtout elle montre la continuité historique de mesures ségrégatives sur un siècle et demi et notamment les manières dont les habitants des beaux quartiers d'aujourd'hui refusent d'être intégrés à la municipalité afin de payer moins d'impôts. L'impression finale est donc mitigée, la grande qualité des derniers textes ne pouvant totalement faire oublier le manque d'un travail éditorial abouti.

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THE HISTORY AND POLITICS OF OIL IN AFRICA

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Poisoned Wells: The Dirty Politics of African Oil. By NICHOLAS SHAXSON. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007. Pp. viii + 280. No price given (ISBN 978-1-4039-7194-4).

KEY WORDS: business, economic, oil, politics/political.

The introduction to this book is contentious. Specifically, the author asserts that because the biggest oil companies in Africa are state owned, '[w]hite people and their companies no longer pull the strings in Africa' (p. 2). This is an oversimplification of the reality. This is because most of the oil production by the indigenous and national oil companies is carried out in joint ventures with Western oil companies. Perhaps more important is the fact that the entire oil production technology belongs to the Western companies. Despite the above, this is a very well researched book that examines the complex relationship between the discovery of oil and corruption among the governing elites in oil-rich African countries. It shows how the discovery of oil and its attendant windfall resources have not in any meaningful way benefited the majority of the people of the oil-rich African countries. Specifically, the book shows how enormous oil wealth has led to corruption and suboptimal economic decisions by the ruling classes in the African countries concerned.

Another dimension of the book is the role of foreign oil companies and foreign interests in the entire process of oil production and the plundering of the host African countries' economies. Specifically, the book convincingly shows how oil interests cloud the judgement of Western countries when dealing with oil-rich African states. In conclusion, the author rightly summarizes the common nature of

the oil problem in most African countries thus: 'The oil fuelled vicious cycle that I saw ... [is] generic: bad leaders corrupt countries, and in corrupt countries, bad leaders rise more easily to the top; dependence on oil and gas damages non mineral industries, making countries ever more dependent on oil and gas' (p. 223).

My problem, however, is with some of the solutions the book proffers. In summary, it recommends that the West should drastically cut its energy use and strengthen regulations that deal with tax evasion by companies and individuals operating abroad. It further recommends that a more equitable strategy for the sharing of the oil windfall in the African countries concerned needs to be devised.

In my opinion, the first two solutions are external to the African continent and can only lead to limited improvements in the polity of the continent. Take, for instance, the issue of cutting energy use in the West. This assumes that oil will remain the most profitable and divisive natural resource on the African continent. This is not necessarily so. Any natural resource in Africa that has the potential of earning huge rents will automatically replace oil as a main cause of future corruption and conflict in the continent. The Democratic Republic of Congo crisis for instance, has little to do with oil.

The third point is, however, more relevant. It is important to reemphasize that oil *per se* has not been the major cause of conflict in Africa. Rather it is the way oil revenue has been shared among the various constituents of the beneficiary country. In the case of Nigeria, for instance, prior to the discovery of oil, the derivation principle reigned supreme in the revenue allocation process. Every region at the time strived to maximize the benefits of its natural endowments. De-emphasis of derivation is, in my opinion, the major cause of the emergence of *rentier* states in Africa. The proliferation of states and local governments in such *rentier* states as Nigeria is simply the consequence of the struggle by various groups to increase their share of the oil rent. Had derivation remained the dominant basis of revenue allocation, the Niger Delta problem in Nigeria today would have been greatly reduced. Perhaps more important is the fact that the collateral damage to non-oil industries would also have been minimized.

In my view, therefore, the major problem has to do with the method of governance. In this direction, the enshrinement and practice of true federalism is fundamental to reducing the conflict and corruption emanating from natural resources in Africa. In order to achieve this, there is a role for both the international community and the Africans. In general, this is an important contribution to the history and politics of oil on the African continent and I am very happy to recommend it to students and activists interested in the subject of oil in Africa.

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CHIBUIKE UCHE

HEINRICH BARTH'S TRAVELOGUE AS A SOURCE FOR AFRICAN HISTORY

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€39.80, paperback (ISBN 978-3-89645-220-7).

KEY WORDS: Northwestern Africa, exploration/travel, precolonial.

The articles in this collection were drawn from a symposium on the German geographer and historian Heinrich Barth held at Timbuktu in December 2004. As