

## REVIEWS

### WERE THERE ‘CULTURE TRAITS’ OF THE MEDITERRANEAN AND NEAR EASTERN SOCIETIES IN PRECOLONIAL WEST AFRICA?

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*Ancient Kingdoms of West Africa: Africa-Centred and Canaanite-Israelite Perspectives*. By DIERK LANGE. Dettelbach: J. H. Roll, 2004. Pp. xiii + 586.  
No price given (ISBN 3-89754-115-7).

KEY WORDS: West Africa, archaeology, kingdoms and states, migration, precolonial.

This volume presents, largely in reprinted form, the collected works of Dierk Lange to date. It is divided into five sections of studies considering, respectively, trans-Saharan relations; the history of Kanem-Bornu; the history of the Hausa states; the history of Ife and, to a lesser extent, the other Yoruba states; and, primarily centred around the royal stelae of Gao-Saney, the history of the kingdoms of the Middle Niger. Finally, a section, *Addenda et Corrigenda*, is appended. Obviously, in a review in 800 words of a book of nearly 600 pages, great selectivity has had to be employed in what can be considered.

Lange outlines the multi-source approach he utilizes, both in the papers but also in his preface, which involves, as he states (p. 1), written accounts, oral sources and ethnographic records. He places an emphasis upon the nature of ‘very stable’ and, for the precolonial period, ‘only slowly changing social and political institutions, cultural patterns and cult-dramatic performances’ (p. 1). This, however, can be questioned as being a generalization that denies the history, vibrancy and dynamism of African traditions and societies, observed today, but also seemingly indicated by the archaeological record as well. This notion of a timeless, unchanging African past is largely a fallacy.

Moreover, and equally fundamentally, the notion of ‘culture traits of ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern societies’ being ‘adopted in African contexts almost unchanged ... particularly during the Canaanite–Phoenician period’ (p. 1) is the resurrection of a type of unsubstantiated diffusionism long since out of favour in archaeology, anthropology and the majority of African historical studies. Of course, should the evidence support such a picture of African – Near Eastern contacts for this period, then diffusion or whatever mechanism should be suggested and explored, rather than ignored for postcolonial political and academic reasons. Yet the existing evidence does not support the occurrence of such contacts, at least archaeologically, and where such evidence might be expected, as in Saharan-fringe West or Central Africa, it is completely absent. This raises the question of how could such supposed contacts have taken place in a material culture vacuum? Such processes are not without a material culture dimension today in the same area, nor did they take place elsewhere during other periods of time without leaving some form of material ‘fingerprint’ in the archaeological record.

Indeed, the evidence which Lange alludes to on several occasions as indicative of trans-Saharan contacts in this era, notably Saharan rock engravings and paintings of horse-drawn chariots, for example at Jado (p. 281), can be seriously questioned

on the basis of the chariots represented,<sup>1</sup> their distribution<sup>2</sup> and their date.<sup>3</sup> As far as this reviewer is aware, the only putative evidence for Phoenician influences upon sub-Saharan Africa might extend to their being in some way responsible for the origins of iron metallurgy amongst the Berbers, and then via the latter its subsequent diffusion into West Africa. But this took place without any movement of Phoenicians themselves into West Africa and is far from proven in the first instance.

Unfortunately, similar critical points can be made if we turn to the area considered by Lange that is best known to this reviewer – ancient Gao. For example, the map provided on pp. 6–7 describes Songhay (and thus Gao) as either a ‘Tertiary Canaanite–Israelite state area’ or as having ‘people showing Canaanite–Israelite cultural influences’ – the indecision over what is being ascribed to Songhay being caused by the map’s shading conventions which are not particularly clear. Notwithstanding this stylistic point, such assertions are supported neither by the written or oral historical sources, nor, as yet at least, by the archaeological data.<sup>4</sup>

Equally, if we turn to the paper ‘From Ghana Mali to Songhay: The Mande factor in Gao History’ (p. 495), seemingly a more recent review of later history, we again get an emphasis placed upon the same bodies of evidence that have been exhaustively studied by various other scholars. Notable here are the royal inscriptions from Gao-Saney which must be the most studied Arabic epigraphic corpus in sub-Saharan Africa! But surely what is needed to truly understand their significance (and Paulo Farias must have had the final word here in a study Lange acknowledges<sup>5</sup>) is for them to be contextualized with the archaeology, and especially the archaeology from Gao-Saney, a site where further work is urgently required. Otherwise much of what is said, focused as it is around the same limited database, is conjectural and repetitive.

In summary, this review has of necessity been critical, but it should also be added that though sometimes this book is infuriating, it is also very readable and provocative, and for that Lange is to be commended. It is of a kind of scholarship not encountered that frequently today!

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TIMOTHY INSOLL

## NIGERIAN HISTORIANS ON PRECOLONIAL NIGERIA

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*Precolonial Nigeria: Essays in Honor of Toyin Falola.* Edited by AKINWUNMI OGUNDIRAN. Trenton NJ and Asmara: Africa World Press, Inc., 2005. Pp. xi + 556. \$119.95, hardcover (ISBN 1-59221-218-2); \$39.95, paperback (ISBN 1-59221-219-0).

KEY WORDS: Nigeria, precolonial.

Toyin Falola, Professor of History at the University of Texas at Austin, has attracted a *Festschrift* in no less than three (very large) volumes, of which this is the

<sup>1</sup> M. Brett and E. Fentress, *The Berbers* (Oxford, 1996), 20–1.

<sup>2</sup> G. Connah, *African Civilisations* (Cambridge, 1987), 119.

<sup>3</sup> A. Muzzolini, ‘Northern Africa: some advances in rock art studies’, in P. Bahn and A. Fossati (eds.), *Rock Art Studies. News of the World I* (Oxford, 1996), 64.

<sup>4</sup> T. Insoll, *The Archaeology of Islam in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Cambridge, 2003), 232–50.

<sup>5</sup> P. Farias, *Arabic Medieval Inscriptions from the Republic of Mali* (Oxford, 2003).

second to appear. Of the others, both edited by Adebayo Oyebade, *The Transformation of Nigeria*, focusing on the period of decolonization and post-colonial Nigeria, was published in 2002; and *The Foundation of Nigeria*, dealing with the colonial period, is apparently still forthcoming. The occasion for this massive celebration is not clearly explained: presumably not imminent retirement, since Falola is still only in his early fifties. His massive scholarly output has focused mainly on more recent times, but he has made substantial contributions to precolonial history also, particularly that of Yorubaland (south-western Nigeria) in the nineteenth century, beginning with his original Ph.D. research – published as *The Political Economy of a Pre-Colonial State* (1984) – and continued in numerous journal articles and chapters in edited collections, on such matters as the organization of commercial caravans, the taxation of trade, the operation of the precolonial currency of cowry shells, pawnship and slavery, warfare and diplomacy, and the representation of precolonial history by local amateur writers. The present volume, after 2 introductory chapters by the editor, one of which appraises Falola's writings on Yoruba history, comprises 25 chapters, grouped loosely under four general headings: 4 on 'Early Foundations', dealing with prehistory; 7 on 'Politics and Institutions'; 10 on 'State, Society and World Systems'; and 4 on the 'Prelude to Colonial Rule'. Of these, 5 are general overviews, dealing with the whole of Nigeria, but most are more narrowly focused on particular regions, ethnic groups, or communities. Refreshingly, the authors are almost all Nigerians, with only two foreigners (one of whom is co-author with a Nigerian colleague); and the great majority of these are based in Nigerian institutions, though a handful – including the editor, and like Falola himself – have joined the academic diaspora to North America. This is welcome evidence that, despite the enormous problems of local universities, the writing of Nigerian history still remains substantially in local hands, and also for the persisting vitality of specifically precolonial history, against what seems to be a general trend of decline, in at least one part of Africa.

The editor commends the book as providing 'a comprehensive introduction to the precolonial history of Nigeria' (p. x). It is not quite that, since its coverage is uneven, both geographically and thematically. Geographically, Falola's Yoruba homeland is strongly, though not excessively, represented, in 4 of the 19 locally focused chapters, and a further 8 dealing with other parts of the former 'southern Nigeria' (Benin, Igboland and the Niger Delta) – altogether nearly two-thirds of the whole. The former north gets 7 chapters, with 4 of these devoted to the 'Middle Belt' (Tiv, Borgu and the Niger-Benue conference area) and only 2 to Hausaland (both on Kano) and 1 to the north-east, and none to the Jos Plateau area. Thematically, the focus varies according to the vagaries of interest of the different authors, though the editor's Introduction makes a valiant attempt to draw out commonalities of theme. Thus, for example, women's history is explicitly engaged only in one chapter, on Igboland (by Egodi Uchendu), urbanization and warfare in one each on Yorubaland (by Babatunde Agbaje-Williams and Aribidesi Usman, respectively). Among traditionally prominent historiographical themes, Islam figures surprisingly little (centrally only in one of the Kano chapters, actually dealing with the *Kano Chronicle*, by Shobana Shankar), nineteenth-century Christian missionary enterprise only in a single chapter (on the Niger-Benue area, by Femi J. Kolapo). Other important themes, notably slavery and the slave trade, appear recurrently, but with varying emphases among the different chapters, without much sense of an overall consensus or interpretative agenda. This is, of course, inherent in multi-author volumes of this sort, and does not in itself detract from the value of this one. On the contrary, a great deal of solid documentation and reasoned analysis is presented, including some treatments of areas relatively neglected in the past (notably Borgu, by Richard Kuba and Olayemi Akinwunmi).

Although the quality and substance of the contributions, of course, vary, the volume includes many excellent ones, by no means only the chapters specifically mentioned earlier. Given its scale and its fragmentation of focus, this is a book to be cherry-picked at leisure, over several sessions, rather than read through in a continuous reading, but it may stand as a worthy tribute to Toyin Falola's scholarly achievements thus far.

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ROBIN LAW

## PATTERNS OF RELIGIOUS INTERACTIONS

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*Christianity and Social Change in Africa: Essays in Honor of J. D. Y. Peel.* Edited by TOYIN FALOLA. Durham NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2005. Pp. xx + 676. No price given (ISBN 1-59460-135-6).

KEY WORDS: anthropology, Christianity, identity, religion.

Beginning with his doctoral work on independent Christian movements in Yorubaland (Western Nigeria), John D. Y. Peel has, since the early 1960s, written extensively on religion in Africa. His interests range from patterns of Christian conversion to processes of religious dialogue, creation of an educated elite and nationalism, ideas of development, and gender and generational conflicts.

This collection of essays from old and present colleagues, students and admirers, is a testimony to Peel's contributions to scholarship on Africa, sociology and anthropology. Although the title is *Christianity and Social Change in Africa*, most of the chapters are responses to one of Peel's most recent, but undoubtedly influential, works, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba* (Indiana, 2000). These chapters deal largely with the patterns of religious encounter/interactions, cultural persistence and how modernity and tradition mutually reinforced each other. It is of particular interest that Toyin Falola, a leading African historian and expert on Yorubaland, a major focus of Peel's research, is the volume's editor. Divided into five parts, part A, titled 'Context and Personality', is a broad survey of the book and an intellectual overview of John Peel. The remaining four parts are both geographic and thematic in approach, with parts B, C and D dealing with various subjects and regions of Nigeria and its diaspora. Topics covered here include the Yoruba world, nationalism and modern Christian manifestations. Part E is more geographically diverse with chapters on Nigeria, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon and Kenya. In the introduction, Falola summarizes the main subject – religious interaction. In what reads like a Yoruba folktale, he locates Yorubaland in Austin, Texas, where the pastor devotes his sermons to advancing the prosperity of the congregation. However, the pastor attributes the problems of unemployed and underemployed church members, or those without the necessary immigration papers, to witches and evil forces. Thus the church became a contested zone between holy and unholy forces. Not too far from the church is a shrine, which invokes Yoruba *orisa* and its outgrowth Brazilian *candomble* practices.

McCaskie takes readers through Peel's intellectual growth – how he moved with ease across disciplinary boundaries – from classics to sociology and historical anthropology. One advantage of this combination is Peel's close reading of source materials. Not so many people working on Africa have followed this route. With that background, other chapters in the book engage Peel, trying to modify, refute, but in most cases confirming, his findings on Africa.

Part B, made up of six chapters, addresses Peel's writings and their relevance to the Yoruba world. Palmie, following Peel, analyses the emergence of a Yoruba ethnic identity through a process of ethnogenesis. He argues that Yoruba ethnicity, in a more meaningful sense, emerged only around 1900, precisely with the compilation of Samuel Johnson's *History of the Yorubas*. For this exercise, Christianity was instrumental in the rise of Yoruba identity, whereas in Cuba, *orisa* religion, partly underpinned by slave/Christian culture and cultural pioneers – Remigio Adechina and Fernando Ortiz – performed the same function. Did Yoruba (Lucumi) identity emerge in Cuba before Lagos? Not necessarily, Palmie concludes. Lucumi identity benefited from Lagos's intellectual renaissance of the 1880s–1930s and the efforts of cultural pioneers – Matory's 'English Professors'. Cultural dialogue between Lagos and Cuba continued later with the Vergers, Sowandes, Abimbolas and Yais of this world. The idea of culture pioneers also permeates the chapters by Nolte on Wole Soyinka and Lonsdale's Young Kikuyu.

Several chapters take issue with Peel's 'age of confusion'. Guyer wonders if 'confusion' is an appropriate depiction of nineteenth-century Yorubaland when instances of this were localized and periodic. Klein and Cornwall examine the impact of social and economic change (confusion?) on ethnic, property, gender and generational relations in Badagry and Ado-Odo. While Cornwall's informants see a 'better past' and 'decaying present', Elisha Renne, in contrast, discovers a 'better present'. She provides data on similarities in *orisa*, Cherubim and Seraphim (C&S) and Pentecostal Christian rituals, identifying similar beliefs in the causes of illness and their cure, prayer and sacrifice, and the symbolism of purity – clean, white cloth.

The ethnogenesis and 'modernization' functions of Christianity are the subject of contributions by Karin Barber, Carola Lentz, Guy Thomas and John Lonsdale. Products of Christian schools produced local histories, formed the core of local and national administrators and advanced the cause of ethnic unity. Unlike the hierarchical structure of *orisa* religion, Christianity, according to Barnes (on sanctuaries), Pratten (Qua Iboe mission) and Brydon (Amedzofe women), courted and protected social inferiors and outcasts – slaves, children and women. Paradoxically, Christianity, with its closeness to the colonial state and later to the Euro-American world, assumed power which it used to reverse the process of persecution. Like the pastor, who is constantly at war against 'witches' and 'evil forces', and 'confident' of victory, Christianity demonizes Islam, local cults and opposing Christian denominations. Meyer (on Ghanaian Christian videos), Kalu (Aladura in Igboland) and Kukah and Ojo (Sharia debate in Nigeria) describe this intolerance of other beliefs.

In the contest, contributors highlight Christians' deployment of 'modernity'. From the 'disco-like' church drums, songs and dresses (Falola) to newspapers, radio and TV in Nigeria (Barber and Ojo), videos in Ghana (Meyer) and cable TV, CCTV, CDs and tapes in London (Harris), Christianity equates modernity with 'victory'. In the RCCG (Ukah) or KICC (Harris), conversion becomes a generational issue. Young people flocked to Pentecostalism because it offered more reward than older denominations. The expectation of reward, sometimes miracles, underpinned Prempeh's conversion in the early twentieth century (McCaskie) and the popularity of Islamic medicine in Yorubaland (Last) and Aladura in Igboland during the Nigerian Civil war (Kalu).

Nevertheless, some issues cannot but attract queries. Continuities, not change permeate *orisa* and beliefs in prayer, sacrifice and spirit possession. One wonders what differences exist between the sacrifice of a goat (*orisa*) and C&S or Bonnke emphasis on candle and money offerings, or spirit possession in Aladura churches and *Sango* or *Ofosi* cults. In Porto Novo, many vodoun priests see Christian Easter

celebration as a 'Christian fetish'. The politicization of religion in Nigeria makes it imperative that discussion of northern Nigeria and pro-Muslim media be explored. Is prosperity gospel local or international? A survey of Christian programmes in North America points to the globalization of the 'gospel of dollars and miracles'. For the purpose of proper identification, figure 4:1 is from Revd Hinderer's visit to Oyo palace in 1859.

That said, the chapters are well written, persuasive and well structured. The book is a useful tool for the study of social transformation and cultural persistence in African, diaspora and cultural studies. To use a Yoruba metaphor, the book sets John Peel on the path to becoming an intellectual 'orisa'.

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OLATUNJI OJO

## PIONEERING AFRICAN AND WORLD HISTORY

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*On the Fringes of History: A Memoir.* By PHILIP D. CURTIN. Athens OH: Ohio University Press, 2005. Pp. xi + 193. \$24.95 (ISBN 0-8214-1645-6).

KEY WORDS: biography, historiography, intellectual, memoirs.

The picture on the dust-jacket cover, that of a broken Land Rover jeep on a bad mud road in Liberia in 1958, summarizes this highly readable book in various ways. Curtin, closing his long career as a sage, knows how to navigate difficult terrain, overcome obstacles and pick up broken pieces, making them into a whole. We see him as a pathfinder and pioneer in various fields of history, charting new territory. We see him as someone who can mend broken programs, and even social relations, ultimately retiring comfortably after a productive career and enjoying the rewards of hard labor in the last phase of a glorious life.

The book is generously illustrated with twenty-three figures and thirty-one plates. The illustrations tell stories of their own, revealing the changing face of Africa in the last sixty years and of the Curtin family as well. In the latter, the portrait of a rich family emerges: here is a man born into high social standing, forsaking a prosperous family business and its enormous wealth to dedicate himself to the academy. It is one of the most successful memoirs to present the social background of a historian. Curtin describes his childhood in West Virginia and how his values were formed in the 1930s and 1940s. Growing up in West Virginia, he was born into a rich and generous Christian family, with parents who were sensitive to the needy and jobless. Indeed, he describes a family that follows in some ways the model of African kinship, a fact that probably explains his later ability to construct a community and serve as a benevolent patriarch. His father encouraged his three sons to pursue higher education, and ultimately the three of them took doctorates. Without a television or good daytime radio reception, Philip became part of what he called a 'bookish family'. Family wealth and his talents paved the way to a rich college education in private settings, with a first degree at Swarthmore (obtained in 1948) and a Ph.D. at Harvard in 1952. In 1939, a journey to Peru became an eye opener, providing him with a new orientation towards the world. As an undergraduate, he took an interest in what he characterizes as 'historical problems with a scientific approach' and in quantitative history (p. 36). Along the way, he developed interests in music, but more so in traveling and kayaking which became a life-time passion.

He stumbled on African history and world history by a series of accidents. As a graduate student, he wanted to escape narrow specialization. He reached a

conclusion as a graduate student which shaped his later career:

the most important process in human history of the past few centuries was the European impact on the rest of the world – not just imperialism, but what went on within the European empires. One could approach the problem from the European side, seeking to explain how Europe gained the power to lord it over the rest of the world. My experience in non-Western cultures, along with my sympathy for people like the Indians of Peru or Guatemala, led me to emphasize the non-Western aspect of the confrontation. (p. 55)

This orientation would explain his books on the European image of Africa, the Atlantic slave trade, and the study of Senegal, all major works. Starting with a thesis on the Caribbean, he moved on to the study of Africa and then to larger trans-Atlantic issues. He recounts in detail how he began to teach African history, in the process producing Africanists and comparatists. This blend he sees as his major achievement – overcoming narrow specialization and paying attention to the history of a neglected continent. ‘Both of these’, Curtin writes in the concluding statement, ‘have now been accepted as part of the mainstream by a new generation of historians; they are no longer on the fringes of history’ (p. 190).

His main achievements were recorded at the University of Wisconsin in Madison where he worked from 1956 to 1975, the time when he established his reputation as a scholar, teacher, administrator and entrepreneur. He established a successful program in African studies, comprising the teaching of African history, comparative history, and a literature and languages department. He trained over 100 graduate students who passed through the Program in Comparative Tropical History (later renamed Program in Comparative World History) which he established. Through this program, new ideas on world history and cross-cultural perspectives spread to different parts of the United States. This catalogue, well documented in the book, is a stunning achievement that may no longer be possible to duplicate.

With this publication and previous ones by Jan Vansina and Roland Oliver, we now have a body of memoirs to reflect upon. It is now possible to see how family and social upbringing shape not only the trajectories of historians but the subjects they choose to write about. At some point in the future, we have to pose the question whether historians who limit themselves to academic work really have much to offer by way of personal stories that may interest more than a few. Turning the dull and busy life of a researcher into a readable and enjoyable memoir is a challenge. In spite of its commendable candor regarding Curtin’s relations with his colleagues, friends, wives and children, this book proves to be such a one.

*University of Texas at Austin*

TOYIN FALOLA

## STATE OF THE ART ON THE AFRICAN DIASPORA

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*Diasporic Africa: A Reader*. Edited by MICHAEL A. GOMEZ. New York and London: NYU Press, 2006. Pp. viii + 317. \$70.00, cloth (ISBN 0-8147-3165-1); \$23.00, paperback (ISBN 0-8147-3166-X).

KEY WORDS: diaspora, African diaspora, identity, intellectual, migration.

*Diasporic Africa* – with its exchange of qualifier and noun this book’s title represents the editor’s aim to place a focus on Africa in African diaspora studies.



This is being done through contributions either on Afrodiasporic cultural elements that are traced back to possible African origins or on movements and individuals that not only refer to an African heritage, but maintain an ongoing connection with the continent or even aim at 'repatriation'. Subtitled *A Reader*, the book presents the state-of-the-art studies on the African diaspora in different disciplines, mainly history but also anthropology, African-American studies and even architecture.

The book is divided into three parts: the first focuses on cultural and technological transformations during the era of slavery in the Atlantic world. There are contributions on West African indigo workers before the nineteenth century, Batuque music and dance in nineteenth-century Bahia, and Kilundu ritual in seventeenth- to nineteenth-century Brazil, Santo Domingo and the USA. The second part brings together studies on memory and religion; i.e. recollections of herbal medicine, rituals and other supposedly African motifs in slave narratives, the negotiating of Black and female identities in an African-American Roman Catholic sisterhood in nineteenth-century USA, histories of 'repatriation' to Africa and Israel of the American 'African Hebrew Israelite Community', and African references in Rastafari architecture in today's Jamaica. Finally, the studies of the third part analyse Afrodiasporic experiences in the context of political processes. Subjects are: Blacks and slavery in seventeenth-century Morocco, Black presence and the meaning of race in the context of the construction of the French nation, references to Africa in perspectives of Black women radicals in the Garveyite and Leftist movements in the early twentieth century, experiences of Black Panther Party Members exiled in Cuba since the 1960s, the expression and shaping of African diaspora consciousness in literature, and finally the trafficking of African women to today's Italy and the consequences of such recent migrations for the theorizing of transnationalism and the African diaspora.

Thorough introductions to the book and to each of its three parts integrate the wide variety of subjects and disciplinary approaches. This unity in diversity is gained through the contributors' discussions of each others' arguments and a common theoretical interest in the centrality of Africa as a focus of identity for people of the African diaspora and also in connections between the continent and the diaspora as a main subject for African diaspora studies. The book could be read as an antithesis to the many works – especially in anthropology, sociology or cultural studies – that analysed the African diaspora mainly in the strain of thinking of authors like Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy, who focus on constructions of Afrodiasporic identity regardless of historical connections or cultural continuities and argue against Afrocentric essentialisms. Criticizing these authors' neglect of the continental-diasporic connections, Gomez fails to integrate the important context of the discussion of Afrocentrism's essentializing tendencies, which consequently leads to Hall's and especially Gilroy's theoretical suggestions taking on a somewhat invisible presence throughout the book. Subjects that were discussed by Gilroy more than ten years ago are being presented as something new and exciting: for example: Afrodiasporic intellectuals' travels as important experiences in understanding African diasporic situations; literature as an actual means of creating the diaspora; or even details like the importance of a trip to Egypt by Douglass.

Furthermore, some contributors' attempts to show cultural continuity between the continent and the diaspora sometimes remain rather vague and fall short of actually convincing the reader that, for example, the simultaneous existence of certain comparable rituals in Africa and the Americas really proves that one was derived from the other. Detailed descriptions of what was actually transported rather than some contributors' vague references to 'African culture' and especially



a discussion of anthropological theories on diffusion, might have led the authors to more careful interpretations.

These criticisms notwithstanding, the broad variety of subjects and disciplines makes this book a very inspiring and pleasant read. The different backgrounds of its contributors add to its strength, as they provide space for a controversial discussion on issues such as anti-essentialist perspectives on identity, Black presence and resistance and the dominant society's multiple reactions to it, and also African origins of Afrodiasporic culture. Thus this book will be fruitful for ongoing debates on diaspora and transnationalism and is indispensable for anyone interested in African diaspora studies.

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HAUKE DORSCH

## SWITZERLAND AND THE SLAVE TRADE

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*La Suisse et l'esclavage des Noirs*. By THOMAS DAVID, BOUDA ETEMAD, JANICK MARINA SCHAUFELBUEHL. Lausanne: Editions Antipodes et Société d'Histoire de la Suisse romande, 2005. Pp. 184. 26 Swiss francs, 18 euros (ISBN 2-940146-52-7).

KEY WORDS: business, slavery, slave trade.

Switzerland is a landlocked country without a colonial past. So the heated debates on slavery that broke out in the national and cantonal parliaments in 2003 at first seemed out of place. Two years earlier, Swiss representatives at the World Conference on Racism in Durban had condemned the slave trade as a crime against humanity. But they had stopped short of writing this declaration into the laws of the land and had stated that the reparations issue was not their concern as Switzerland had never been involved in the slave trade. Left unsaid was the Swiss belief in the country's clean history and the way this helps hold together the constellation of cantons that make up the Confederation. According to this view, the Swiss population is bound by an experience and history of neutrality and compassion that provides it with a unique role in the world.

The Swiss image of self has taken an expensive knock from recent revelations about the country's collaboration with Nazi Germany and the confiscation of Jewish investments by its banks during the war. So when historians challenged the view of their country's representatives at the Durban conference, Switzerland's complicity in the slave trade became a moral issue with potential economic consequences. For if the country was guilty of this crime against humanity, it seemed fully possible that it would face further claims for reparations from more injured parties. But who was the guilty party 200 years after the event? The state, the cantons, the patrician families who had built part of their wealth on this trade and who remain at the centre of much of political life in the cantons?

This book reads like a detective novel as its authors peer beneath the calm exterior of this quiet country. Their indefatigable investigations take us from the drawing rooms of the great families that provided a refuge for persecuted Protestants to the stinking slave ships on which a good part of their wealth was built. This is not a particularly original theme for English, French or American historians who are well aware that the architectural magnificence of many of their coastal ports, or the wealth of their libraries and universities, may be traced to the profits drawn from the slave trade. But in Switzerland it is a new and challenging view that at once underlines the global influences on the country's history

and challenges established self-perceptions. The book also provides a wonderful example of the historians' craft at work.

The book starts with a long and important introduction by Bouda Etemad. Two equally long chapters by Thomas David and Janick Marina Schaufelbuehl follow, on Switzerland and the trade in slaves with the Americas and on the anti-slavery movement in the country. The authors uncover a spectrum of ways in which the Swiss contributed to the development of the slave trade. The high returns of the commerce in human beings attracted Swiss individuals and banks to invest in this commerce. Expeditions from French ports to the coast of Africa and the Americas were extremely expensive due to the cost of the cargoes and the dangers faced by crews and ships. This meant that Swiss suppliers had to group together to share the costs of the voyage. It also meant that insurance was an integral part of the trade and that the Swiss invested heavily in this field. But their major contribution to the slave trade came through the production and exchange of printed cloths called *indiennes* that were brought to Switzerland by Huguenot refugees in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. These cloths were initially exchanged for colonial products such as indigo, rice, sugar and coffee. But their Protestant manufacturers and traders soon found a more profitable outlet for their goods when *indiennes* became a prized element in the cargoes exchanged in Africa for slaves. Over time Swiss companies established branches in the ports of France and eventually bought their own ships that, bearing names such as 'La ville de Basle', or 'L'Helvetie', bought slaves in Africa and transported them across the Atlantic. A firm such as Christoph Burckhardt & Cie, that produced *indiennes* in its factories in Basel and in Nantes, was involved in 21 slaving expeditions.<sup>1</sup> The Neuchâtelois patrician David de Pury held shares in a company that shipped more than 42,000 slaves from Angola. From his offices in Lisbon, de Pury organized an international commerce in which slavery formed only a part. When he returned home, he gave to Neuchâtel its city hall and hospital and, on his death, his statue was erected in the place Pury.<sup>2</sup> The authors estimate that twenty Swiss firms organized about 100 slaving expeditions between roughly 1760 and 1815 and that they contributed directly or indirectly to the transportation of some 175,000 slaves to the Americas.

They also show that citizens of Switzerland, the home of democracy and freedom, owned and exploited plantations worked by slaves in several parts of the Americas, most notably in Brazil where slavery was only abolished in the 1880s. Swiss soldiers also served in military campaigns in slave colonies in 1773 (Surinam) and 1802 (Haiti). They show that the Swiss effectively dodged a confrontation between notions of slavery and freedom in their own country. This happened in the late 1820s–'30s when the town of Yverdon had to decide on the rights of the illegitimate son of a slave brought into the canton of Vaud by her owner, an officer in the Dutch East India Company. Procrastination solved the problem as the man died before any decision could be taken. Thirty years later the Federal parliament criticized the involvement of its citizens in slave plantations in Brazil but took no action against them. Whether Switzerland took action against slavery through the imposition of high tariffs on goods produced by slaves is not examined in the book; nor do we hear of the extent to which the country later outlawed the participation of its citizens in the trade (an offence that the British punished by hanging or transportation).

<sup>1</sup> See Niklaus Stettler, Peter Haenger and Robert Labhardt, *Baumwolle, Sklaven und Kredite. Die Basler Welthandelsfirma Christoph Burckhardt & Cie in revolutionärer Zeit (1789–1815)* (Basel, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Hans Fässler provides a guide to nineteen sites in Switzerland that were built on the profits of the slave trade in his *Schweizer Ortstermine in Sachen Sklaverei* (Zurich, 2005).

The book provides a clear guide to the extensive research on which it is based. Cantonal and federal archives provided scant information but family archives were vital – especially those of the branch of Burckhardts in Nantes (Bourcard Fils et Cie). These papers were discovered in the walls of the firm's building in Basel when it was renovated in 1935 and are today in the city archives. Other families have been more circumspect about giving access to papers that might link them to the slave trade. This book makes an original and important contribution to the literature on the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Just as importantly, it underlines the importance of transnational history to a country such as Switzerland.

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PATRICK HARRIES

## THE PRODUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE ON FEMALE CIRCUMCISION IN AFRICA

doi:10.1017/S0021853706272438

*Female Circumcision and the Politics of Knowledge: African Women in Imperialist Discourses*. Edited by OBIOMA NNAEMEKA. Westport CT: Praeger, 2005.

Pp. ix + 288. No price given (ISBN 0-89789-864-8); no price given, paperback (ISBN 0-89789-865-6).

KEY WORDS: gender, power, inequality, knowledge, women.

This edited volume offers another perspective on the controversial topic of female circumcision in Africa and its diaspora, focusing on how the production of knowledge reflects unequal power relations internationally and historically. During the 1980s, female circumcision became a *cause célèbre* among Western feminists who saw it as damaging to women's bodies and sexuality. Renamed female genital mutilation, the often uninformed and insensitive tenor of subsequent eradication efforts offended many Africans and Africanists. The volume's authors present diverse disciplinary critiques of these efforts, although they are not opposed to eradicating all, or certainly the most drastic forms of, female circumcision (Type III – also known as pharaonic). Rather, several contributors discuss successful collaborations between African-based NGOs and African women who are working to stop these practices.

The importance of including African and Africanist scholars and writers in these debates is discussed by Obioma Nnaemeka in the volume's introduction. Using the theme of border-crossing, she argues that the discussions of female circumcision must be analyzed 'as part of a long line of imperialist/colonial discourse'. Indeed, as she observes in a later chapter, the changing terms used to refer to these practices – from female circumcision to female genital mutilation to female genital cutting – reflect Western forms of knowledge production which have little to do with how African women view these practices. She also notes the parallels between female circumcision and development discourses, which have historically reflected colonial and post-colonial inequalities.

Following this introduction, the book consists of four parts organized thematically. In the first chapter in Part I, Nawal El Saadawi echoes Nnaemeka's point about processes of power and inequality, observing that colonial educators in Egypt sought to depict local practices as 'barbaric' and to privilege Western forms of knowledge. Obioma Nnaemeka continues this discussion of colonialism, using the recent 'raj revival' as an example of how contemporary Western feminists' focus on female circumcision reflects a derogatory view of African women, mirroring earlier colonial thinking. The importance of unraveling the historical contexts of

these colonial and postcolonial constructs of African women is explored by Omofolabo Ajayi-Soyinka, who uses the writings of Alice Walker and Ama Ata Aidoo to argue for mutual understanding among African American and African women.

In Part III, specific aspects of female circumcision are considered. These chapters examine how past and contemporary resistance to eradication efforts have been associated by the West with backwardness and underdevelopment (Kirby); how the legal debate over excision in France is argued in terms of universal human rights (Lionnet); and how these discourses, which reflect a continuation of colonial power dynamics – of which the ‘repugnancy rule’ is an earlier example – are determined by Westerners (Korieh).

The chapters in Part IV return to an assessment of Alice Walker’s film about female circumcision, *Warrior Marks*, in relation to films about colonial Africa (Akudinobi), and to other documentary films about female circumcision (Brière). Walker’s written work on female circumcision, *Possessing the Secret Joy*, is also criticized as exemplifying universalist, essentialist claims about women, without historical or sociological analyses which might decenter this pronouncement (Obiora). The final three chapters cite ways that differences between Western feminists and African women might be addressed, with Sondra Hale calling for self-reflection on the part of Western feminists; and with Chimalum Nwankwo commending Olayinka Koso-Thomas’s careful study of female circumcision and its meanings for African women as an exemplary model for Western feminist research. In the final chapter, Ange-Marie Hancock argues for the need for reconstructive collaboration in which both Western and African women seek to understand each other’s positions with respect and on equal terms.

Historians may feel frustrated with the spare historical examples used in some of the authors’ arguments. Nonetheless, this thought-provoking volume – which probes the bases of ethnocentric ‘value-free’ and ahistorical approaches to social issues – provides a valuable corrective to the dominant discourse on African women’s practice of female circumcision. It would have been interesting to have incorporated a discussion of Ousmane Sembene’s film, *Moolaade* (2004) – released too late for inclusion in this volume – which treated the topic of female circumcision, and to know what, if any, connection it had with the international NGO, Tostan (cited in chapters by Nnaemeka and Lionnet), which has successfully worked with Senegalese communities to come to a consensus about stopping female circumcision.

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ELISHA P. RENNE

## A TRAVEL ACCOUNT ON PRECOLONIAL WEST SUDAN

doi:10.1017/S0021853706282434

*The Narrative of Robert Adams, a Barbary Captive. A Critical Edition.* Edited by CHARLES HANSFORD ADAMS. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. Pp. lxvi + 190. £35.00, hardback (ISBN 0-521-84284-0); £12.90, paperback (ISBN 0-521-60373-0).

KEY WORDS: North Africa, West Africa, text edition, travel literature, sources.

It is a little disconcerting to find Cambridge University Press using an engraving of slavers in Central Africa, taken from Livingstone’s *Last Journals*, as the cover illustration for a book on North Africa and Timbuktu. Or is the irony intentional? After all, the original illustration, like some parts of this book, represented little more than an Englishman’s attempt to convert a foreign traveller’s

vague assertions about Africa into an effective piece of moral propaganda. Charles Hansford Adams describes his namesake as an 'African American seaman', basing this somewhat anachronistic term upon the fact that Robert Adams's mother, possibly an American, was thought to be 'a Mulatto' and he himself was described as 'very dark ... with short curly black hair'. The lengthy discussion of the alleged 'veiling of Adams' blackness' strikes me as unnecessarily contrived.

The original book, first published in London in 1816, describes Adams's experiences of shipwreck, slavery and ultimate ransom. He was subsequently discovered in London by the African Company at a time when interest in the exploration of the West Sudan was rapidly growing, and a narrative compiled from his answers to questioning by members of the Company was published. It was accompanied by scholarly footnotes, many of them by Joseph Dupuis, the consul who had ransomed Adams and who would himself later become an explorer of Asante.

Attempts to depict the book as a total fraud were made soon after its appearance and have been repeated recently, but it is clear that these go much too far. As the editor argues, men like Dupuis would hardly have risked their reputation in this way; moreover, much of what Adams says about North Africa sounds just about plausible. Nevertheless, it is generally agreed that the section on Timbuktu contains too many oddities to be genuine.

Apart from reiterating this point, the editor's 45-page preface has relatively little to say about Africa, being mainly concerned with the more fashionable topics of White writing, orientalism and anti-Islamism. The editor's knowledge of African history appears to rest mainly upon historical dictionaries and encyclopedias, and one searches in vain for references to the growing body of literature on early nineteenth-century semi-fictional travel literature in English concerning West Africa ('News from nowhere', 'Drake's fake', 'Hawkins' hoax', to name just three articles). To discuss the African Company without knowing the works of Martin or Metcalfe and to deal with armchair geography of West Africa in this period without reading Masonen is inexcusable. The Timbuktu wordlist (p. 48) would have benefited from closer analysis: for instance, isn't *or* (gold), French?

From an Africanist point of view the book's strengths lie rather in the fact that it assembles not only the original text, including its remarkable footnotes and appendices (demonstrating the laudable efforts that were made in those days, quite unlike our own, to ascertain authenticity), but also two contemporary essays published in the *North American Review* the following year. The book is enjoyable to read, the preface includes useful background information, and the index is helpful.

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ADAM JONES

## ARCHIVAL DOCUMENTS OF DANISH TRADING COMPANIES

doi:10.1017/S0021853706292430

*Danish Sources for the History of Ghana 1657-1754*, volume I: 1657-1735; volume II: 1735-1754. Edited by OLE JUSTESEN. Translated by JAMES MANLEY. UAI Fontes Historiae Africanæ. Series Varia VIII. Copenhagen: The Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters, 2005. Pp. xxxviii + 1058. No price given (ISBN 87-7304-312-5).

KEY WORDS: Ghana, precolonial, sources, trade.

The editor, Dr Ole Justesen of the University of Copenhagen, deserves the plaudits of scholars for making available the impressive corpus of seventeenth- and

eighteenth-century archival documents of two Danish trading companies. The corpus pertains to the companies' activity at their Gold Coast commercial establishments from the mid seventeenth to the mid eighteenth century. The two volumes under review contain documents of the Glückstadt African Company, which was founded in 1659 by royal charter and retained its privileges until 1674. It operated from the town of Glückstadt and was responsible for the administration and maintenance of Danish trading stations in Guinea. In 1674 the privileges of the African Company were transferred to the West India Company, which had been chartered in Copenhagen in 1671. Upon acquiring the privileges of the Guinea trade, the company changed its name to the West India and Guinea Company. The archives of the African Company for 1659–73 have not survived, except for those that were placed in the Danish Government Archives or were committed to the safekeeping of its successor, the West India and Guinea Company. The West African headquarters of the companies was initially at Fredericksborg Fort (1657–80) near Cape Coast and later at Christiansborg Castle (1680–1754) in the coastal town of Osu.

Volume I is divided into nine sections and covers the years from 1657 to 1735. Volume II is divided into three sections and covers the years from 1735 to 1754, the year of the African Company's dissolution. The documents are given in chronological order. The introduction includes a review of Company administration on the Gold and Slave coasts. It contains a wealth of detailed information pertaining to weights, measures and currency systems in Denmark and other northern European countries, as well as units of weights of gold, units for trade goods, forms of trade, and pricing (e.g., slave price and gold price) on the Gold Coast. As expected, there is an abundance of information on imports and exports. There is a useful discussion of the complexities of language. The normal language is Danish but from the seventeenth century there are quite a few records in German and Dutch (Nederlandish). For various reasons, which the editor spells out, passages, sentences or words were omitted from the original documents when the Danish text was being written. Thus, the two-volume text is not a direct English translation from the original language of the Companies' records, but a translation from a Danish manuscript edited and reworked by the editor. Scholars interested in the information that has been omitted must consult the original documents in the National Archives in Copenhagen.

There is a glossary of non-English words. There are four excellent maps of West Africa, the Gold Coast, the Slave Coast and Europe. These enable readers to locate easily places mentioned in the documents. There are three detailed indices: an index of places and peoples, an index of persons and their statuses, and an index of selected topics (e.g., agreements, buildings, caboceers, livestock, pawns, provisions, ships and trade). There is a superb bibliography of published primary and secondary sources and, where relevant, annotations provide contexts to clarify meanings and references in the documents.

The corpus includes letters that the governors of Christiansborg (earlier Fredericksborg) sent to the Company's directors (or to the Danish king) to report on the Company's commercial operations over a stipulated period. Accompanying the letters, some of which run to more than ten pages, were other records (or 'enclosures'). Among these are correspondence from factors in the outstations and ships' captains to Christiansborg Castle, minutes and resolutions of the Secret Council of factors, trade accounts or ledgers, lists of debtors and pawns, lists of Company employees, journals, and treaties or agreements with local rulers. The documents provide meticulous accounts of life in and around the Danish trading stations, for one learns about local politics, customs and institutions, conflicts and disputes, religious beliefs and practices, ceremonies of different kinds, local

judicial practices and proceedings, political and social relationships, warfare, the supply and cost of provisions, and commercial transactions. Importantly, there are hundreds of references to named individuals, such as stool-holders, traders, brokers, boatmen and Company employees. This information provides illuminating particulars about the social composition of the Gold Coast's mercantile world.

The two-volume text is an excellent and detailed source of data with respect not only to the daily operations of the Atlantic slave trade on the West African/Gold Coast side, but also to an understanding of a multi-faceted Gold Coast history. Dr Justesen has to be commended for having produced this invaluable rich resource. Historians and other researchers will find it indispensable.

*University of California at Riverside*

RAY A. KEA

### SOURCE MATERIAL FOR PRECOLONIAL AFRO-EUROPEAN TRADE

doi:10.1017/S0021853706302435

*A Danish Jew in West Africa: Wulff Joseph Wulff: Biography and Letters 1836–1842.* Edited by SELENA AXELROD WINSNES. Trondheim Studies in History No. 46, African Series No. 6. Trondheim: Faculty of Arts, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, 2004. Pp. xii + 217. c. \$35/NOK 225 (ISBN 82-7765-049-3).

KEY WORDS: Euraficans, Ghana, memoirs, precolonial, sources, trade.

In recent years, there have been a number of editions of accounts by Europeans engaged in trade on the African coast in the precolonial period, providing precious source material for the history of Afro-European trade relations and African coastal societies. Selena Winsnes's edition of Wulff Joseph Wulff's letters to his family is a valuable addition to this growing corpus. Wulff was a Danish Jew who, between November 1836 and November 1842, was employed at Christiansborg Castle, Accra, the main Danish trading establishment on the Gold Coast. He married a local woman of Afro-European descent, founding a family which still exists in Ghana today. He died on the Coast shortly after the expiration of his six-year contract with the Danish Board of Trade, on 16 December 1842, and was buried (according to local custom) in the cellar of his house, where his grave can still be seen. This, however, was not so much because he had gone 'native' but because, being a Jew, he could not be buried in the Christian graveyard, where most of his European colleagues ended up.

During his spell on the Coast, Wulff wrote many letters to his family in Denmark. Of these, 37 (plus 2 written while he was still in Europe), with a diary covering the period from January to March 1839, were published in 1917 by a descendant, Carl Behrens. This edition comprises an English translation of Behrens's book, with annotations, an index, several plates and maps and a biographical essay. Wulff's letters give detailed information concerning the daily life and the outlook of the Europeans on the coast. They document his unhappiness and feeling of isolation, the competition and infighting among the Europeans, their frequent parties, the overindulgence in food and drink – which in Wulff's case led to worrying obesity – and the constant threat of illness and death, with graphic accounts of the symptoms of the various diseases contracted by Europeans. There is also some information concerning African communities and their relationship with the European traders. This includes references to the *homowo* festival ('Black



Christmas'), the pursuit of an Afro-Brazilian slave trader by the Danish, and conflicts between the Europeans and various African groups. An interesting aspect of this account is that Wulff's Jewish identity, according to Winsnes, made him a 'marginal man' among his colleagues on the Coast. He certainly felt discriminated against on account of his religion, believing this to be why promotion was denied to him. However, apart from this and several references to Jewish rituals, which imply that he was a practising Jew, his experiences on the Coast (or at least his account of them) were not substantially different from those of other European traders.

Winsnes is an expert in translating and annotating Danish sources, and, as usual, she does a very good job, although her biographical essay on Wulff is overlong and repeats much of what is said in Wulff's letters. Some of the annotations leave room for minor criticism, too. Thus, in her note on the role of slave-holding as a form of investment, a more specific discussion of the contemporary situation on the Gold Coast would have been welcome, rather than a reference to John Thornton's book, which deals with the period before 1800 and not specifically with the Gold Coast (p. 161, n. 205). Also, the merchant Hutter who lived at Cape Coast in 1836 is likely to have been Thomas Hutton rather than Theodore Hutton (p. 101, n. 104).

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SILKE STRICKRODT

## THE EMERGENCE OF A CONGO PROPHET

doi:10.1017/S0021853706312431

*Simon Kimbangu 1921: de la prédication à la déportation. Les Sources.* Edited by JEAN-LUC VELLUT. Brussels: Académie Royale des Sciences d'Outre-Mer, 2005. Pp. xxxiii + 178. No price given (ISBN 90-75652-35-6).

KEY WORDS: Congo, African modernities, Christianity, missions, rebellion, religion, sources.

The study of early twentieth-century Congo Christianity has made some leaps and bounds since Ephraïm Andersson first published *Messianic Popular Movements in the Lower Congo* (1958). The scholarly interest Congo religiosity continues to elicit among researchers on both sides of the Atlantic should no doubt be attributed to the revivalist tradition that took root in the Lower Congo area starting in the late sixteenth century. No other revivalist figure has been as legendary, yet often misunderstood, as Simon Kimbangu. Jean-Luc Vellut's edited volume could potentially redress this situation. The first installment of an anticipated four-volume archival compilation devoted to Simon Kimbangu, this volume covers the brief period of evangelical ministry and thaumaturgic activities of the Congo prophet, from his first healing miracles in March 1921 to his deportation to Elizabethville in November 1921.

Although not a sophisticated and novel exposition of Kimbangu's prophetic ministry, Vellut's introduction to this first volume sheds some light on the historical context that led to the emergence of the Congo prophet and frames the early twentieth-century revivalist movement as a search for an African modernity outside of Belgian colonial tutelage. This is, indeed, the underlying theme that traverses most of the sources that he has carefully assembled. In the 1880s, in keeping with the status of the Congo Basin as a 'free state' under one of the most brutal regimes the world had ever known, several European missions, including the Missionary Swedish Alliance (Svenska Missionsförbundet, SMF), set up

stations in the Lower Congo. In 1921, at the peak of Kimbangu's revivalist movement, the SMF had some of the most active missionary stations in the Lower Congo, manned by 73 Swedish missionaries and 390 Congolese catechists.

The primary documents gathered in this first volume come almost entirely from letters, reports, photographs and memoirs written and taken by these missionaries, and as such they are useful not only to scholars who have a vested interest in Kimbangu's evangelical work but also to those who focus on European missionary attitudes toward African converts. Many of these documents reveal the racial prejudice that even well-meaning Scandinavian missionaries harbored. They portray African Christian converts as 'primitive saints' as long as they yielded to the spiritual authority of white missionaries and kept their religiosity in line with European liturgy. Africans who distanced themselves from European churches and flocked to Nkamba, Kimbangu's missionary center, or other prophetic outposts, are derided in the SMF missionaries' accounts, with the notable exception of Sven August Flodén's memoirs, published in 1933. His narratives stand out for the pertinence of their judgement and the quality of their analyses. Flodén ministered in the Lower Congo from 1892 to 1929 and was one of the few SMF missionaries who witnessed firsthand the religious revival that radiated from Nkamba like spokes on a wheel. Unlike his numerous fellow missionaries who scoffed at the idea of an independent African Christian religiosity, he saw in Kimbangu's movement the same spiritual merit and limitations he recognized in European Christianity.

In addition to these European narratives, the volume contains also several accounts in Kikongo (with a French translation) written by Congolese Christians who walked the tightrope between their obvious fascination with Kimbangu's ministry and their loyalty to the established European churches. One such author is SMF evangelist Paul Nyuvudi who traveled from the French Lower Congo to meet with Simon Kimbangu in Nkamba. Falsely accused of sedition by the French authorities, he was deported to Chad where he spent two years in exile before returning to Congo. Nyuvudi's account is a unique and inspiring African travelogue that should find its deserved place in that literary genre.

*Indiana University*

C. DIDIER GONDOLA

## REVIVING AFRICAN ECONOMIC HISTORY

doi:10.1017/S0021853706322438

*Labour, Land, and Capital in Ghana: from Slavery to Free Labour in Asante, 1807–1956.* By GARETH AUSTIN. Rochester NY: University of Rochester Press, 2005. Pp. xxiv + 589. £45 (ISBN 1-58046-161-1).

KEY WORDS: Ghana, agriculture, economic, labour, land tenure, markets, slavery.

In his many previous articles and book chapters, Gareth Austin has already made a major contribution to Ghanaian and Asante studies. The present, long-awaited, work does far more than pull together these earlier writings. It is an ambitious effort to use the Asante case to revivify the somewhat moribund field of African economic history. Austin undertakes this task through a combination of detailed empirical research and thoughtful reconsideration of relevant economic theory.

The Asante narrative focuses on commercial agriculture, beginning with the shift from slave-trading to cash crops in the early nineteenth century and giving

most attention to the cocoa economy of the colonial era. Austin stresses the changing relations between factors of production, mainly labor and land (the only major capital involved being mature cocoa trees). As the book's sub-title indicates, the movement is one 'from slavery to free labour' but the latter category fluctuates between the familiar one of male wage employment (only dominant in periods of very high cocoa prices) and various forms of family (especially female) work forces and sharecropping. There is a more general ambiguity about the progression which Austin presents: on the one hand, the productive use of local resources continually increases; on the other, the system depends upon labor scarcities and land abundance which cannot continue indefinitely.

Austin makes much more serious use of economic theory than most historians of Africa. He seeks to move beyond the debate between 'substantivists' and market rationalists which characterized the early phases of the sub-field but also avoids the stylized reductionism of more recent rational choice literature. Readers of this journal will be happy to note that the book has no equations and the handful of graphs are mostly quite simple. The theory upon which Austin builds his analysis is 'New Institutionalism' which, instead of assuming/imagining individuals freely choosing their optimal utilities, examines the way actual economies manage the imperfect markets that they must confront. Particular use is made of two notions: 'induced institutional change' by which the Asante develop new forms of economic organization (more specifically property rights) to meet changing needs and opportunities; and 'rent-seeking,' the efforts to make short-term or one-sided profits from either monopoly power or the availability of uncultivated land.

This book is very long but Austin's somewhat repetitious presentation of theory is remarkably lucid. He also provides ample evidence from modern Asante history to show not only the way economic issues work themselves out but also how external factors – particularly British precolonial and colonial action against slavery – created the context for internal transformation. For the main part he sees the Asante acting autonomously. Colonial restrictions upon the power of chiefs only allowed greater freedom for small-scale actors in the agricultural sector. He recognizes British conservatism concerning divisions of African society into capitalists and a potentially unmanageable proletariat, but concludes that economic factors are more significant in the 'failure' of a full market in landed property, with larger units of production, to arise.

The most serious criticism one can make of this work is also – from a historian's perspective – one of its strengths: an ultimate ambiguity about both the forces moving the Asante economy and what this experience means for longer-term and more general African development. At several points in his argument Austin notes that 'theory offers insights without sufficiency' (p. 449), i.e., no economic concepts can fully explain the changes taking place in Asante, much less in Africa as a whole. Nonetheless, some theories are more insightful than others. Austin is particularly critical of 'vent for surplus', which argues that colonial infrastructure provided outlets for hitherto unused labor in the tropics, thus accounting for immediate booms in productivity which cannot be sustained without further, externally induced, 'modernization'. Following established historical arguments, Austin indicates that the recourse to slavery in the precolonial Asante economy resulted from a shortage, not a surplus, of available labor. However, his own view of land resources parallels 'vent for surplus' to some degree. He makes frequent use of the concept of 'forest rent', an idea developed about worldwide tropical cocoa-growing which argues that it follows a constantly shifting frontier of virgin lands, thus obviating any need (or market demand) for more intensified production in already cultivated areas. The test of this proposition comes when available open lands in a specific country are exhausted. Does the region then lose its market to

newer forests elsewhere or do new institutional innovations arise to met the challenge? In the case of Asante, this decline in forest rent only began in the 1950s, when Austin's account comes to an end. It is difficult to fault a historian for not extending his argument beyond the period he is studying. However, Austin has taken on a set of theories that were designed to explain more than the past. His own reluctance to pursue them into the near-present, not to say future, is understandable but it leaves even historians wondering about the ultimate significance of this very impressive work.

*University of Chicago*

RALPH A. AUSTEN

## CIVIL DISPUTES AND SOCIAL LIFE IN THE FRENCH SOUDAN

doi:10.1017/S0021853706332434

*Litigants and Households: African Disputes and Colonial Courts in the French Soudan, 1895–1912.* By RICHARD ROBERTS. Portsmouth NH: Heinemann, 2005. Pp. xii + 309. No price given (ISBN 0-325-00258-4).

KEY WORDS: West Africa, courts, law, marriage, power, slavery, slavery abolition, social.

Richard Roberts has already demonstrated how the initial years of colonial rule in the French Soudan ushered in dramatic social transformations, such as mass slave exoduses in the middle Niger valley. This book continues his concern with this era and focuses on entry-level civil disputes taken before *tribunaux de province*, new colonial courts, in four districts of the French Soudan (Bamako, Bougouni, Gumbu and Segu). These courts heard their first disputes in 1905, the same year colonial edicts abolished slavery, and operated for decades, but the records, which were written by French officials supervising these courts, end in 1912. Roberts analyzes an archival run of over 2,000 cases and uncovers the struggles associated with the end of slavery, initiatives of African women and men to accumulate new forms of wealth, and other aspects of social life in the French Soudan.

Roberts situates the new courts into the colonial milieu. In the first two chapters, he discusses the establishment of the *tribunaux de province* against the backdrop of French colonial legal systems elsewhere, as well as the consolidation of French rule in West Africa. He then examines the disputes which Africans brought before the courts, presenting the data in a series of chapters devoted to specific legal categories: marriage and divorce, bridewealth, inheritance and property. Roberts's analysis of the cases moves between quantitative assessments of the aggregate data and close readings of individual disputes. He captures African women and men crossing what he calls 'landscapes of power' and testing new colonial institutions. For example, African women strategically by-passed negotiations in local settings, where the emphasis would have been on conflict resolution, to take their divorces to *tribunaux de province*, where French officers encouraged their African judicial appointees to grant their petitions, until an emerging colonial discourse about stability in African households led the French and the judges to support patriarchal authority. The changing court decisions underscore the unsettled nature of the colonial consolidation, as other historians, such as Martin Chanock, have documented in previous studies of colonial courts.

*Litigants and Households* offers fresh insights into slavery and abolition in the Western Sudan. The aggregate court data from Gumbu, which experienced slave

exoduses in 1908 and 1909, shows that litigation over property spiked in the months just before the exoduses and that divorce cases increased in the years thereafter, especially during the months of significant labor demands in the agricultural cycle. Roberts argues that the property disputes primarily involved *woroso* (second- and third-generation slaves) who had received loans of property from their masters, and found themselves in court as slave-owners sought to prevent their flight through litigation. Slave departures led to increased agricultural demands on former masters' wives and the subsequent rise in domestic disputes, as marriage carried labor obligations for wives which had not been demanded as intensively by husbands until after the exoduses. While the court cases necessarily emphasize conflict over reconciliation, Roberts's analysis brings into sharper relief the contours of a broader social context in which slaves and masters, wives and husbands, negotiated their relations.

Roberts draws other conclusions about social and economic history from the court records. He builds on Chanock's distinction between 'old' and 'new' forms of property in colonial Africa, engages French assumptions about household organization in the French Soudan and offers a sophisticated analysis of local struggles involving competing claims to wealth. Roberts also corroborates the post-emancipation shift to livestock ownership as a dominant form of capital investment, a transition which also helped to erode ethnically bounded economic niches: disputes over herds, for example, increasingly came to be decided on contractual grounds. Women brought many of the disputes to the courts, and Roberts makes their legal strategies a major theme.

*Litigants and Households* merits a wide readership. Roberts places the new courts into the shifting 'landscapes of power' of the early colonial era and makes compelling arguments about the ways Africans and Europeans shaped the decisions. Roberts's interest extends beyond the courtroom to focus on the contested social relations which came before the judges. Roberts's methodology – moving between aggregate data and individual cases – is a model for social historians. He shows awareness of the textual dimensions of the records, but probes them to find evidence of African strategies. One might have wanted to know more about the judges themselves and the interaction of multiple legal spheres, but Roberts provides ample details about *tribunaux de province* and demonstrates profound knowledge about the cases. *Litigants and Households* brings the everyday struggles of African women and men to the foreground and makes a major contribution to our understanding of the tumultuous early years of the French Soudan.

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JOHN H. HANSON

## EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN WAR VETERANS

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*Reisen durch den Krieg: Erfahrungen und Lebensstrategien westafrikanischer Weltkriegsveteranen.* By BRIGITTE REINWALD. Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2005. Pp. 444. No price given, paperback (ISBN 3-87997-620-1).

KEY WORDS: Burkina Faso, microhistory, military, war.

L'étude de Brigitte Reinwald, qui a été présentée comme thèse d'habilitation à l'Université de Vienne, Autriche, en 2003, propose une approche sociologique et culturelle d'un sujet qui, par le passé, a surtout été traité sous l'angle de l'histoire militaire: sa question de départ est de savoir quelles conséquences les soldats

africains originaires surtout de la Haute Volta (Burkina Faso), enrôlés dans l'armée française, ont tirées de l'expérience de leur participation à la Seconde Guerre Mondiale, et quelles traces cette expérience a laissées dans leurs activités professionnelles, sociales, politiques et culturelles ultérieures. La période étudiée s'étend de la fin de la Guerre jusqu'aux Indépendances (1960–2) et au-delà, jusqu'au tournant du millénaire.

L'ouvrage se compose de quatre parties: (1) 'l'Introduction' (pp. 19–48) définit la problématique et le champ d'investigation, fait le bilan de l'état de la recherche et indique les matériaux (les 'sources') utilisés, le plan et les procédés méthodologiques; (2) la première partie principale: 'En Guerre – Topographie des souvenirs vécus' (pp. 51–222), situe le recrutement des soldats de la Haute Volta dans le contexte plus vaste de la mise en valeur coloniale des forces de travail et du système de contrainte et de coercition, du travail forcé des 'prestations' jusqu'au recrutement plus ou moins 'volontaire'; viennent ensuite les expériences de la guerre même, à partir des récits des personnes concernées et au regard des 'lieux de mémoire', qui sont analysés en opposant les communautés militaires et 'civiles'; (3) la deuxième partie traite, de façon explicite, la réintégration dans la vie coloniale quotidienne, ses problèmes et ses solutions (pp. 225–349); (4) le sous-titre 'Bilan et perspectives' (pp. 351–61) résume les résultats les plus importants et propose des perspectives pour des recherches ultérieures. L'Appendice (pp. 393–444) illustre, à partir de deux schémas, les différents grades de la hiérarchie militaire et la structure du commandement dans les troupes africaines, et donne les références exactes – noms de participants, temps et lieux – des 44 interviews, dont 4 sont intégralement reproduites.

Le travail de Brigitte Reinwald, véritable microanalyse d'un corpus de récits de vie de vétérans ouest-africains de la Seconde Guerre Mondiale, a été rendu possible grâce à l'existence préalable d'un bon nombre (auquel sont venus s'ajouter d'autres) de recherches exhaustives et de travaux portant sur l'histoire militaire et sociale: ceux-ci nous ont déjà renseigné sur 'les fonctions et le statut des soldats africains, les domaines de leur emploi dans les travaux et sur le front, leur démobilisation et leur retour dans leur pays d'origine'. Pour Brigitte Reinwald, comme pour d'autres, c'est surtout l'étude de Myron Echenberg (1991) qui sert d'ouvrage de référence pour la compréhension de l'histoire des Tirailleurs Sénégalais dans une perspective d'histoire sociale. On trouve par ailleurs des études spécialisées sur les contingents de Tirailleurs malgaches, sénégalais et ivoiriens.

Cette étude ne comble pas seulement une lacune sensible par rapport à la participation de soldats africains dans l'armée française pendant la Seconde Guerre Mondiale, celle du contingent important des originaires de la Haute Volta, auxquels elle donne la parole; elle innove aussi du point de vue méthodologique, en déplaçant son centre d'intérêt vers des zones qui, jusqu'à aujourd'hui, étaient restées dans l'ombre, et qu'elle recompose comme une mosaïque polychrome de l'histoire mentale: les processus de l'expérience et de l'appropriation de la grande Histoire au niveau des individus et de leurs subjectivités deviennent sensibles et tangibles, à partir de la guerre et de l'exil, dans le temps de la mémoire et de sa représentation narrative. Le 'montage', comme principe heuristique du travail, permet d'établir des liens entre des aspects qui habituellement sont séparés, voire négligés dans des études linéaires qui suivent le fil de la simple chronologie.

L'analyse du système des recrutements est intégrée de façon convaincante dans le système global des contraintes et de la coercition de la période coloniale, qui va des travaux forcés «ordinaires» et limités dans le temps ('prestations') jusqu'au système totalitaire de 'l'Indigénat', auxquels on pourrait ajouter le système disciplinaire des recensements et la quotidienne 'guerre des papiers', un système qui se prolonge pendant les décennies de l'après-guerre dans les combats pour un

traitement égalitaire (dédommagements, pensions de guerre, d'invalidité, prise en charge des veuves et des orphelins) par rapport aux camarades de guerre français.

Ce qui rend la lecture du travail de Brigitte Reinwald particulièrement passionnante est le fait qu'elle réussisse à montrer comment, à partir du dynamisme du recrutement des soldats et autres «travailleurs», non seulement la mobilité (inter) régionale des personnes concernées et les processus de migrations s'accélérent, mais que les Tirailleurs Sénégalais qui, dans les *Hosties Noires* (1948) de Léopold Senghor, sont encore présentés comme des victimes sans défense, se révèlent être des participants actifs et créatifs dans ce jeu intercontinental: ils se servent des possibilités d'action qui s'offrent et développent des stratégies qui leur garantissent non seulement la survie, mais qui, finalement, les mènent à une vie meilleure, du point de vue professionnel et par rapport à leur statut familial et social.

Comme la Première Guerre Mondiale, la Seconde Guerre Mondiale se révèle être un catalyseur important sur le chemin qui mène vers la décolonisation et l'indépendance politique. Il serait sûrement intéressant d'étudier comment l'évolution d'après 1945, favorisée par des processus globaux d'émancipation du 'Tiers Monde' et par la Guerre Froide, a gagné – par rapport au premier après-guerre – un dynamisme nouveau et, cette fois, irréversible. Des événements comme la 'mutinerie' des Tirailleurs démobilisés dans le camp de Thiaroye près de Dakar en décembre 1944 et sa répression brutale par des officiers français vichystes sont devenus des 'lieux de mémoire' et ont marqué une 'césure' (p. 243) à plus d'un titre. Ils montrent surtout que, du côté des Africains, on n'était plus prêt à se laisser faire ni à retourner à l'ordre du jour en rétablissant le *status quo ante*.

L'étude de Brigitte Reinwald, basée sur un matériau riche et complexe, nous semble une contribution importante pour une meilleure compréhension d'une période décisive dans les relations eurafricaines du vingtième siècle, le début de l'ère 'politique' dans leurs rapports mutuels, dont les conséquences se font sentir jusqu'aujourd'hui. L'armée comme 'pivot' de la vie des vétérans de la Guerre a exercé une influence décisive sur la population de l'AOF en général et de la Haute Volta en particulier, et a déclenché un processus qui a permis aux populations concernées de mieux comprendre leur époque et ses transformations et d'y avoir une part plus active.

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JÁNOS RIESZ

## POWER AND GOVERNANCE IN NORTHERN MOZAMBIQUE

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*Kupilikula: Governance and the Invisible Realm in Mozambique.* By HARRY G. WEST. Based on research conducted in collaboration with Marcos Agostinho Mandumbine and with assistance from Eusébio Tissa Kairo and Felista Elias Mkaima. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005. Pp. xxviii + 362. \$17.50, paperback (ISBN 0-226-89405-3).

KEY WORDS: Mozambique, governance, oral sources, power, resistance, witchcraft.

Scholars are moving beyond disciplinary boundaries to engage concepts of power and order/disorder interfacing many disciplines. In the process they are probing for meaning in less accessible, less visible and even invisible realms. In *Moving the Centre; The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms*, Ngugi wa Thiong'o urged



scholars and artists to re-center language, chronology and images to ground their analysis in meaning assigned by the peoples of the continent. Achille Mbembe's *On the Postcolony: Studies in the History of Society and Culture* further argued that all people have languages of power – languages that scholars must penetrate beyond the mastery of fluency, transcription and translation.

Harry West picks up on Ngugi's and Mbembe's leads, exploring power and governance on the Mueda plateau of northern Mozambique through discourses of sorcery, counter-sorcery and healing. He interrogates sorcery (*uwavi*) discourse as a lens into struggles over power: who holds it, by what means, to what ends and against what resistance. His title – *kupilikula* – highlights his appreciation of the many ways in which Muedans have navigated governance and accumulation processes in association with shifting engagements with 'others' on the plateau over the past century. Beneficent, maleficent, constructive, protective, self-promoting and destructive forces contend 'in an unending series of transcendent and transformative maneuvers, each one moving beyond, countering, inverting, overturning and/or reversing the one preceding it. Power, indeed, is synonymous with such maneuvers: the (albeit temporarily) decisive unmaking and remaking of another's exercise of power, referred to in *uwavi* discourse as *kupilikula*' (p. 7). Women sometimes figure in these maneuvers, but although he does not draw specific attention to gendered perspectives on *uwavi*, West is mostly interested in the kinds of power men exercise and manage.

West extends his interrogation of governance back to the ivory- and slave-trade era of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Portuguese colonial conquest and anti-colonial insurgency, but his narrative is most detailed and lively for the late twentieth century. He picks up on the many ironies and contradictions of post-independence socialism and the contemporary promotion of neoliberal democracy conducted by people he refers to as 'reformers'. West credits Muedans' 'suspicions and recriminations' with comprising 'a perceptive critique – a discursive "undoing" (*kupilikula*) – of neoliberal reform in the postsocialist era' (p. 189). Indeed, through his extended engagement of Muedans' maneuvers, West also achieves a kind of *kupilikula*, cleverly up-ending and re-framing received wisdom on science, power and governance. West's critique of what Mbembe calls the 'privatization of sovereignty', his observations about reformers' 'liberalizing patronage and patronizing liberalism' (p. 230), and his discussion of attempts to resurrect traditional political authorities as part of the outsourcing of governance are as amusing as they are insightful.

Those of us who are decidedly more comfortable with material evidence confirmed in the visible realm have a lot to learn from West's innovative and creative work. His arguments are subtle and persistent. He repeats them, often shifting the context, the lens and the angle to develop a cumulative process. Throughout the 28 mini-chapters, each of which opens with a cameo from his research on the Mueda plateau during the 1990s, West walks us through his analysis. West not only explores whether the lions marauding on the Mueda plateau of northern Mozambique are 'bush lions' or lions made by Muedans, he also helps us see why the possibilities and probabilities of lions' origins matter, and to whom.

Although his cameo strategy works well at several levels, it strains placement in time and space and careful attribution of oral evidence – major concerns for historians. West conducted hundreds of interviews during his decade of research in Mueda. He quotes people extensively, but he does not reference his interviews. Instead, his footnotes reference comparative studies in Mozambique and beyond that underscore the point's broader resonance. Sometimes the narrative text specifically locates the speakers in time and space, but not always. West's claims

regarding what ‘ordinary Muedans’ thought would have been enhanced had he included Muedan narrators in his bibliography and cited his interviews.

By the end of the book, I trusted West’s attention to language and his use of evidence. However, he shook my confidence before I finished the prologue. Anyone dealing with twentieth-century Mozambican history should know the difference between a *chamboco*, a whip, and a *palmatório*, the famous wooden paddle the Portuguese used to beat Mozambicans. He not only confused them, but he misinterpreted the source he cited for their definition (xxvii, n.5 p. 279). Some readers may be annoyed by West’s insistence on *shimakonde* language use, and his repeated translations, but *kupilikula* and *uwavi* are not easily translated, linguistically or conceptually. Despite the repetition and an occasional frustration with the glossary, I thoroughly enjoyed this book. West’s is not a ‘celebratory portrayal’ (p. 210). Rather, he insists that readers grapple with Muedans’ ambivalence, uncertainties and contradictions. In short, he renders his ‘ordinary Muedans’ believable – whether they are visible or invisible.

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JEANNE MARIE PENVENNE

## POSSIBILITIES AND LIMITS OF NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENTS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA AND ELSEWHERE

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*Negotiated Revolutions: The Czech Republic, South Africa and Chile.* By GEORGE LAWSON. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005. Pp. xii + 272. £47.50 (ISBN 0-7546-4327-1).  
*Ending Civil War: Rhodesia and Lebanon in Perspective.* By MATTHEW PRESTON. London and New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2004. Pp. xiv + 322. £49.50 (ISBN 1-85043-579-0).

KEY WORDS: South Africa, Zimbabwe, comparative, international relations, politics.

Area specialists typically treat the political transitions of Zimbabwe in 1980 and South Africa in 1994 as ‘late decolonizations’, delayed by entrenched European settler interests. Rather than looking back to the earlier wave of African independence for comparison, these two books look ‘sideways’ to political developments outside the continent – Matthew Preston comparing the negotiated settlements of the Zimbabwean and Lebanese civil wars, and George Lawson comparing South Africa’s democratic transition with those of the Czech Republic and Chile.

Though Preston and Lawson approach their studies from quite different angles, the two books’ substantive concerns converge considerably. Preston looks to the settlements punctuated by the Lancaster House agreement in Zimbabwe and the Taif agreement in Lebanon for lessons about ‘negotiated war termination’. Lawson, meanwhile, considers the profound, yet relatively peaceful, transitions to democratic politics and market economics in countries like South Africa, the Czech Republic and Chile, relating these ‘negotiated revolutions’ critically to conventional sociological conceptions of modern revolution. Central themes in both books include the possibilities (and limits) of negotiated settlements in bringing about major political and social change, and the post-Cold-War rise in international involvement in promoting such settlements.

Preston contends that the Zimbabwean and Lebanese civil wars are best understood as political struggles for control of the state, and that in both cases the lack of overwhelming power asymmetries between contending factions favoured an eventual settlement. Instead of asserting a straightforward causal link between stalemate on the battlefield and agreement at the negotiating table, though, he examines the course of each conflict in several crucial domains – including military–civilian relations, intra-factional politics, and external intervention and mediation. Drawing on prior studies, official documents, and local and international news reports, he deftly constructs layered narratives that capture the complexity of civil wars without losing analytical focus. Though he seeks to draw general lessons, his attention to detail leads him to conclusions that serve mainly to puncture the plausibility of easy generalizations. For example, he notes that while international actors and analysts fixate on devising and identifying effective mediation and settlement techniques, the success or failure of intervention often rides at least as heavily on political factors ‘internal’ to civil wars themselves.

In contrast with Preston’s circumspection, Lawson boldly seeks to advance a new theoretical understanding of the post-Cold-War shift from various forms of autocracy to ‘market democracy’. Borrowing from the title of Heribert Adam and Kogila Moodley’s 1993 book on South Africa, he labels these transitions ‘negotiated revolutions’. The terminology is not accidental, as Lawson depicts them as contemporary analogues of the French, Russian and Chinese revolutions – all, in various ways, embodying social dislocations associated with modernity. In his view, liberal triumphalism since the collapse of the Soviet Union, reflected in mainstream Western theories of international relations and democratization, has obscured important social dimensions of these political transitions. Yet he also criticizes sociologists for essentializing features of earlier modern revolutions – such as their utopian ideologies, their violent ‘fights to the finish’, and the presence of a suspicious (even actively counter-revolutionary) international community – that often do not apply in the contemporary world. He argues, most effectively in the concluding chapter, for an approach grounded in ‘international sociology’, fusing sociologists’ attention to the substance of modern social struggles with international relations specialists’ recognition that global changes have altered the forms such struggles can and do take.

Though Lawson’s country studies serviceably illustrate his general thesis about ‘negotiated revolutions’, their quality as contemporary histories falls well short of the standard set by Preston. Lax referencing and occasional factual errors mar the South Africa chapter. For example, Lawson reports breakdowns of the 1994 vote for major political parties by race (p. 146), but does not identify the source of these figures – which, in an election with a secret ballot, cannot be based on direct observation. Later, he erroneously asserts that the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC), through which organized business and labour participated in the overhaul of apartheid-era labour legislation, was supervised by the government’s Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP) department (p. 161). He apparently (again, no reference) confused Jayendra Naidoo, NEDLAC’s first head, with Jay Naidoo, the then-minister responsible for the RDP, and concluded that NEDLAC was ‘subordinate’ to the RDP department. In fact, NEDLAC’s primary statutory affiliation, specified in its founding Act, is to the labour ministry. The South Africa chapter will not lead the reader badly astray, but many other available accounts cover similar ground more reliably. So, unlike Preston’s book, which rigorously analyses the Zimbabwean and Lebanese civil wars but shies from generalizations, Lawson’s main contribution is his provocative general argument and not the country-specific material.

Whatever their respective strengths and weaknesses, these books' common comparative approach draws attention to the fact that, despite Zimbabwe's and South Africa's obvious similarities as neighbouring ex-settler colonies, they undertook their political transitions in very different international settings. The 1996 South African constitution is not simply the Lancaster House agreement with a 17-year time lag. Understanding the differences – and their implications for both countries' futures – requires attention not only to internal dynamics, but also to the profound intervening changes in the global environment.

*University of the Witwatersrand*

ROD ALENCE

## INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVES ON THE SIERRA LEONE CIVIL WAR

doi:10.1017/S002185370637243X

*Between Democracy and Terror: The Sierra Leone Civil War.* Edited by IBRAHIM ABDULLAH. Dakar: CODESRIA, 2004. Pp. vii + 263. \$25/£20, paperback (ISBN 2-86978-123-7).

KEY WORDS: Sierra Leone, civil wars, democracy, rebellion.

The editor of this book, a historian, deserves special praise for bringing together an interdisciplinary group of Sierra Leonean scholars, with the exception of one contributor. The volume provides a much welcome indigenous perspective on the Sierra Leone civil war, which has received widespread global attention. Prior to this publication, the bulk of the scholarly writings on the war had been by non-Africans. In his introduction, the editor traces the genesis of the volume on the Internet and provides a critical review of the literature by Western scholars on the origin of the war. He argues for historicizing the conflict that is centered on domestic causal factors.

The book is divided into three sections. The first section examines the domestic environment of the war. Yusuf Bangura's essay discusses the All People's Congress (APC) era. He also challenges the theses of foreign scholars on the reasons for the war. Ibrahim Abdullah's chapter offers a historical account of the rebellious culture in Freetown, the capital city of Sierra Leone. He further examines the connections between radical groups and the birth of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). Ismail Rashid's chapter traces the rise of revolutionary groups of students and underclass youths in Freetown. Rashid situates the essay in the varied and rich social and cultural Freetown society. Corruption as both a cause of the war by the RUF and a primary reason for the continuation of the war by the state is discussed in the chapters by Sahr John Kpundeh and Arthur Abraham. For Kpundeh, corruption is a major reason for the conflict. However, he argues that it can be corrected through civil society intervention. To this end, he offers various approaches. For Abraham, the long duration of the war is rooted in the shared interests of the RUF and the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) in diamond mining for personal gains. The illegal pursuit of diamond wealth was undertaken by both senior officers as well as the rank and file of the country's army.

The second section examines Sierra Leone's search for democratic rule starting with the 1996 general elections. This was interrupted by the military coup of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) – RUF Junta in 1997. In this section are two chapters by Jimmy Kandeh. The first discusses the return to

parliamentary multi-party politics in 1996. The second provides a critical examination of the second republic under the presidency of Ahmad Tejan Kabbah of the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP). Lansana Gberie's essay examines the profiles and domestic actions of the 1997 coup leaders. He also provides valuable insights into the role of undisciplined and criminally minded participants in the overthrow of the SLPP government. Olu Gordon's essay examines the role of the country's independent press in challenging the coup leaders and defending democracy. In the third section, Abraham's essay examines the domestic and international peace initiatives for Sierra Leone. Funmi Olonisakin's chapter analyses the role of Nigeria and the Economic Community of West African States Ceasefire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) in the war. The third essay by Abdullah and Rashid examines the role of children as both victims and combatants in the war.

One of the strengths of this book is the detailed historical reconstruction of the developments leading to the outbreak of the war. Key to this is the APC era under the presidencies of Siaka Stevens and his chosen successor, Joseph S. Momoh, between 1968 and 1992. The APC perpetrated widespread violence against opponents and imposed a one-party state in 1978.

However, the volume has a few organizational problems. Abraham's essay in the first section seems out of place. It should have been included in the second section on the course of the war. In addition, the chapter by Abdullah and Rashid on child soldiers is not consistent with the focus of the preceding two chapters on the external factors of the war. It would have been helpful to have this essay, like that of Abraham, in the second section.

The book would also have benefited from a map of West Africa that would have allowed readers to locate Sierra Leone and the neighboring countries, especially Liberia, that had a direct involvement in the war. Besides, a map of Sierra Leone showing the areas that were affected by the war would have been helpful to readers, particularly those not familiar with Africa. Notwithstanding these minor shortcomings, the book is well researched and rigorously argued. It makes a significant contribution to our knowledge of the most destructive conflict in the post-independence history of Sierra Leone, and deserves the widest possible circulation.

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ALUSINE JALLOH

## THE HISTORY OF TWENTIETH CENTURY SOUTH AFRICA

doi:10.1017/S0021853706382436

*The Rise, Fall, and Legacy of Apartheid*. By P. ERIC LOUW. Westport CT: Praeger Publishers, 2004. Pp. xviii + 255. \$49.95 (ISBN 0-275-98311-0).

KEY WORDS: South Africa, apartheid, racism, violence.

*The Rise, Fall, and Legacy of Apartheid* is an ambitious discussion of the much-contested history of twentieth-century South Africa, written with the express purpose of making that history accessible to non-specialists. The book begins with the construction of a unified South Africa in the wake of the Anglo-Boer War under the direction of Alfred Milner. The book ends with a brief chapter that describes the policies of South African President Thabo Mbeki as a neo-colonial attempt to build an African middle class to form the basis of a stable internal

government and to develop economic relations in a globalizing world. Thus, Louw uses imperialism and globalization as bookends for the twentieth century: South African policy-makers were constrained in the early 1900s by the reach of the British Empire, and they are constrained in the early 2000s by the limits imposed on them by a world economic order.

Despite Louw's use of international events and actors to frame his study, the bulk of the book is concerned with the theory and practice of apartheid, and the complicated mix of violence and negotiation that led to its demise. He largely relies on the works of other scholars for his data, and provides lists of the most important information. The chapter on 'The theory of apartheid' is a rich and well-developed account of the political and cultural foundations of the social theories elevated to practice by the election of the National Party to power in 1948. Other chapters show a similarly comprehensive scope, making this a useful primer on political history.

Louw perhaps relies too much on bullet-point lists, however. For example, his detailed lists in the section describing the burgeoning violence across South Africa in 1985 (pp. 144–6) ultimately do not provide much analysis of these important events. Similarly, Louw's chapter on 'The struggle against apartheid: evolving visions' provides extensive lists of most of the major African nationalist political movements in the last century; but the reliance on bullet-points makes the chapter seem like the notes that a prospective author might make in preparation for writing a book chapter rather than the chapter itself. Such lists may have been an attempt to provide a lot of information (all well-documented) in a very compressed format. Yet the result is a near absence of exposition that makes the material and the author's analysis less clear than it might have been.

A significant insight of the book is Louw's use of the notion of the development and evolution of 'racial capitalism' as a unifying theme in his analysis. He initially uses the phrase in the Preface to suggest a dynamic synthesis between two older schools of historiography: 'liberals' and 'Marxists'. Louw suggests, reasonably, that at the peak of the dispute between proponents of these two paradigms in the 1970s and 1980s, liberals were too enamored of a 'teleological argument in which capitalism represented "necessary progress" ... and [liberals concluded] that the market would eventually undermine apartheid', while Marxists tended to overemphasize the class character of exploitation, which led them to the conclusion that 'overthrowing apartheid would automatically translate into overthrowing the capitalist-induced misery of millions' (p. ix). Louw develops a third point of view that implicates both race and class in the creation of apartheid, and that sees the relationship between race and class as functional but not essential. This makes it possible, in Louw's view, to explain the overthrow of apartheid and the persistence of a highly oppressive version of capitalism in the 'new' South Africa.

Louw writes that it is necessary for any real understanding of South African society to grapple with the beliefs held by the dominant minority of white Afrikaners during the construction of the apartheid state. White political beliefs informed the state's policies during apartheid and provided a conflict-ridden legacy for the post-apartheid state controlled by the African National Congress. While the significance of Afrikaner beliefs is implied in the text, Louw does not explicitly comment on why Afrikaner beliefs are more essential to understanding South African history than, for example, African political beliefs, which he also discusses, but without giving them the same status in his analysis. Louw asserts (rather than analyzes) that during the years of National Party rule, the leaders of the ANC held closely to the Marxist line that apartheid and capitalism were one and the same. The ANC's adherence to this analysis, according to Louw, meant that ideologically its leaders were poorly prepared to develop policies for a

post-apartheid South Africa that still practiced capitalism marked by high levels of inequality and exploitation. This is an intriguing argument but it deserves greater scrutiny in the book.

Amherst College

SEAN REDDING

## THE COLLECTION OF THE DAKAR–DJIBOUTI EXPEDITION

doi:10.1017/S0021853706392432

*Les Peintures sacrées d'Éthiopie: collection de la Mission Dakar–Djibouti.* By CLAIRE BOSCH-TIÉSSÉ and ANAÏS WION. Paris: Sépia, 2005. Pp. 133. No price given (ISBN 2-84280-091-5).

KEY WORDS: Northeastern Africa, Ethiopia, arts, museums and memorials, travel.

The French Dakar–Djibouti ethnological expedition (1931–2) has been an infrequently debated event in the history of Africanist anthropology. Led by Marcel Griaule, then in his early thirties, it was conceived as both an extensive ethnographic survey and an art- and artefact-collecting mission to enrich the Parisian Musée du Trocadero (now the Musée de l'Homme). Its inspiration deriving both from the grand eighteenth- and nineteenth-century scientific expeditions and from the fashionable American and European motorized expeditions that were crisscrossing various regions of the globe (financed by Dodge, Citroën, etc.) after the end of the First World War, it was a high-profile mission that benefited from comprehensive support from the French government and from private donors (among them the American car-maker Ford). Apart from Griaule, who had practised fieldwork in northern Ethiopia in 1928–9, none of the members of the expedition had any serious anthropological training. They were, for the most part, self-confident youths, somewhat bored with Parisian intellectual life. Michel Leiris, a promising writer who had recently dropped out of André Breton's circle, was charged with writing the expedition's journal.

The expedition's plan included the conducting of two intensive surveys, which were to give it its notoriety: a long visit to the Dogon of Mali that would soon be followed by many others, and an art-collecting spree in Gondar, northern Ethiopia, that lasted the best part of five months. It was mainly the collection of Gondarine objects that were to fuel accusations of heartless racist plundering thrown at the team and its leader. Until the recent publication of *Les peintures sacrées d'Éthiopie*, a thorough inventory and analysis of the expedition's Ethiopian collection, most discussions on the mission's objectives and results lacked objectivity in regard to the context and extent of this 'plundering', and particularly to the intrinsic characteristics and quality of the collected materials.

The authors, Anaïs Wion and Claire Bosch-Tiéssé, two French historians specializing in Ethiopian Christian art, have achieved a fine balance between analysis of the historical and theological context of the collection, description of the anecdotal aspects of the collecting processes – including the controversial substitution of the Abba Antonios church seventeenth-century wall-paintings for new ones produced by the team's painter, Gaston-Louis Roux – and presentation of the collection's inventory. Clearly, their goal is not that of dealing with the whole of the expedition or of relating it with the Parisian intellectual environment of the thirties. It is a work of specialists in the rather closed field of Ethiopian studies who



have benefited from both an intimate knowledge of the collection and complementary documentation, and from intensive fieldwork experience in the Christian church and monasteries of the Ethiopian Amhara region.

The book is timely in that it is published just as the expedition's collection is set to be permanently displayed in a new space – the Musée du Quai de Branly, in Paris – after being out of the public's view for some years. The specialist reader may feel somewhat frustrated by the book's too synthetic presentation of controversies surrounding what has been frequently termed as an 'act of plundering'. Too little attention has been given to the political and cultural context that led to the Dakar–Djibouti expedition, and even to the relevance of the mission for the later development of Ethiopian studies in France. The detailed bibliography and the referencing footnotes help readers satisfy their curiosity and further explore the conundrums of this fascinating and polemical mission. The book offers good clues as to why Marcel Griaule subsequently abandoned Ethiopian studies and dedicated himself to researching the Dogon. Towards the end of their stay in Gondar, the ecclesiastical and political authorities' ever-mounting (and apparently justified) suspicion of the foreigners' art-plundering and slave-freeing intentions made it practically unsustainable for them to work and collect, thus sealing Griaule's parting with Ethiopia.

One hopes that the publication of this volume motivates further serious research on the expedition's collection, and that this work will not be submerged by demagogical contentions regarding the devolution of the collection to Ethiopia, as insinuated in the Ethiopian local press (see the inflammatory article of R. Pankhurst, a self-proclaimed defender of Abyssinian cultural heritage, in the *Ethiopian Herald*, 26 Feb. 2006).

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MANUEL JOÃO RAMOS

## AGRICULTURAL INTENSIFICATION IN TANZANIA

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*A History Under Siege: Intensive Agriculture in the Mbulu Highlands, Tanzania, 19th Century to the Present.* By LOWE BÖRJESON. Stockholm University, Department of Human Geography, Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis/ Stockholm Studies in Human Geography 12. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2004. Pp. 187. SEK 246 (ISBN 91-22-02095-0).

KEY WORDS: Tanzania, agriculture, cartography, pastoralism.

Lowe Börjeson's study challenges the theory that agricultural intensification occurred in Mbulu, Tanzania, and other precolonial East African sites because hostile pastoralists effectively placed growing agrarian populations 'under siege', blocking their expansion into new territory. Knowing that such 'siege theory', which in truth does not exert great influence on historians, has already come under the close scrutiny of Börjeson and other contributors to *Islands of Intensive Agriculture in Eastern Africa* (2004), historians may overlook this study. If so, they will miss a geographer's interesting perspective on important conceptual and methodological issues in environmental history.

The core of Börjeson's study is highly detailed mapping of a tiny area of twelve hectares. He mapped not only the obvious signs of agricultural intensification such as terraces, but also scarcely perceptible features such as the edges of terraces built

up by downhill hoeing. Börjeson calls his method 'participatory landscape mapping' because, while surveying, he talked with farmers about changes in the land. Historians will envy the opportunities which the geographer's work with the theodolite creates for conversation about the past with curious farmers. Yet, Börjeson's method, adapted from the study of 'fossil landscapes' in medieval Europe, may somewhat disappoint historians because it seems to take us no further back into the past than does oral history. For this reason, Börjeson wisely draws heavily upon the oral evidence presented by the University of Dar es Salaam historian Y. Q. Lawi in his unpublished dissertation.

Börjeson uses his cartographic data to argue that, rather than deterministically attributing intensification to a single causal factor such as population growth, historians of agronomic change should consider how multiple factors create synergies, contingencies and 'positive feed-back loops' (pp. 166–9). He interprets his data to mean that improvements in the land result not from deliberate attempts to increase output, but from the cumulative effect of simple, repetitive practices such as hoeing and marking field boundaries. Terraces result from cuts originally made in slopes to separate plots, while valley bottoms are widened and converted from swamp to rich arable land through the gradual process of hoeing soils downhill. Because improving the land attracts new migrants to increasingly productive farmland, suggests Börjeson, improvement is as likely the cause as the result of demographic growth. Indeed, he argues that Mbulu experienced its most marked population growth not while 'under siege' from pastoralists in the nineteenth century, but while cultivation was also expanding in surrounding areas in the twentieth century. Börjeson is probably correct in saying that any search for the origins of such processes of improvement are bound to be fruitless. For this reason, however, while his story of intensification as the inadvertent consequence of routine fieldwork is stimulating, it does not prove wrong the historians who see in the landscapes of Mbulu and other East African islands of intensification evidence of deliberate projects of improvement.

Börjeson's generosity in citing Y. Q. Lawi and other Tanzanian scholars reminds us of the highly unsatisfactory state of scholarly collaboration in Tanzania at present. Those of us who come from outside Tanzania benefit from fine unpublished scholarship carried out by our Tanzanian colleagues, while the institutions in which these colleagues work provide faculty with neither the resources nor the time they need to publish their own research.

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JAMES L. GIBLIN

## RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES IN UGANDA

doi:10.1017/S0021853706412433

*The Vitality of Karamojong Religion: Dying Tradition or Living Faith?* By BEN KNIGHTON. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005. Pp. xvi + 349. £55.00 (ISBN 0-7546-0383-0)

KEY WORDS: Uganda, religion, social organization.

Africanist historians trying to excavate precolonial religious beliefs and practices, especially among illiterate pastoralists, face complex methodological and interpretive challenges – including a lack of documents and records, the 'thinness' of archaeological sites, dispersed scatterings of linguistic data, and contradictory

recollections of oral histories and myths. Even contemporary studies must cope with the mobility of people (and thus of their ideas and practices), cultural and social fusions and fissions as pastoralists engage with and sometimes assimilate neighboring peoples, and long histories of Christian and Islamic presence. In *The Vitality of Karamojong Religion*, Ben Knighton addresses these issues and more, with a dense, detailed study of the religion of the Karamojong (encompassing Jie, Dodoso and Karimojong) in Uganda, who are perhaps better known for their fierce cattle raiding (armed now with AK-47s) and conflicts with the state.

Knighton's argument is nicely articulated in the book's subtitle: is Karamojong religion a 'dying tradition' or a 'living faith'? Drawing on archaeological, linguistic, historical and ethnographic data, Knighton argues forcefully that Karamojong religion is an 'enduring traditional religion' that has withstood the incursions of Christian missionaries, state development programs, AK-47s, Western education and other socioeconomic changes. In fact, according to Knighton, it is the very resilience and strength of Karamojong faith that has enabled the Karamojong people to persist socially, culturally, economically and politically in the present in much the same ways as they did in the past, *despite* external interventions. To support this controversial thesis, Knighton first uses archeological, linguistic and oral historical evidence to reconstruct the migrations and social formations of Karamojong, then their traditional social institutions (with a focus on age-sets), religious beliefs and practices. To demonstrate the continuity of Karamojong traditional religion from the 1830s (when 'different ethnic groups and customs were irrevocably amalgamated': p. 74) into the present, he compares earlier historical and ethnographic accounts (such as Philip Gulliver's and John Lamphear's studies of Jie, and Neville and Rada Dyson-Hudson's studies of Karimojong) with data from interviews with contemporary informants, participant-observation, and transcription of religious rituals, practices, prayers and more. The use of the 'ethnographic present', even when citing sources from the 1930s and 1950s, emphasizes his argument.

Knighton has assembled and analyzed a vast amount of primary and secondary data from diverse sources; the text is thick with details, references and footnotes. His use of linguistic analysis to derive meanings and sociohistorical relationships is especially rich and compelling. Nonetheless, historians (and others) will find some of his analytic methods troubling. First, rather than just showing evidence of parallels between contemporary and historical practices (which stills leaves unanswered the question of whether they *mean* the same thing then and now), Knighton sometimes describes a practice, name or belief cited in a much earlier secondary source as a contemporary practice. Thus, for example he writes on page 214 '[A man] may beg other oxen of the same hide markings from family or friends, so that most men have about five (Gulliver, 1952b: 72-4).' Perhaps they had five in 1952, but where is the contemporary evidence for this number? Second, Knighton admits that in his effort to study only Karamojong traditional religion, 'care was taken to sift out any small tendency to Christian reconstruction or abolition of traditional religion' (p. 14). As such, it should come as no surprise that he discovers the persistence of an unchanged, traditional religion, since any changes were excised from the analysis at the beginning. Moreover, since 64 per cent of his informants gave 'European-derived Christian names', one had a Muslim name and three were Anglican clergy, one wonders even more about Knighton's insistence that 'world religions' have had little impact on Karamojong faith. Finally, to insist that the 1830s provides some kind of stable baseline for the formation of Karamojong society and identity, which has remained unchanged for almost 200 years, seems dubious at best, given the very history that Knighton describes but dismisses.

Despite these problems, *The Vitality of Karamojong Religion* is a valuable book for scholars of African religion and East African pastoralists. Knighton's rich linguistic analysis raises interesting questions for a comparative study of Nilotic religions. His attention, however brief, to the beliefs and practices of Karamojong women is also fascinating, with important parallels among Maasai, Turkana, Samburu and other East African pastoralists. As for his central thesis, Knighton has certainly demonstrated that Karamojong religion persists as a 'living faith', but questions about the dynamism, changes and continuities of that faith (and Karamojong lives) also persist.

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DOROTHY L. HODGSON

### THE INTERPRETATION OF TEXTS IN COLONIAL KENYA

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*Creative Writing: Translation, Bookkeeping, and the Work of Imagination in Colonial Kenya.* By DEREK R. PETERSON. Portsmouth: Heinemann Books, 2004. Pp. xiii + 289. No price given (ISBN 0-325-07131-4).

KEY WORDS: Kenya, Christianity, knowledge, literacy, nationalism, politics, religion.

Derek Peterson's original and challenging book is linked to the debates within both historical writing and literary theory. In literary theory, there are raging debates about the centrality and identity of the author. Thus, 'are all writers authors or only some? What in any given period, makes the difference?' (Roger Fowler). In any literary work, is the author the 'sole or privileged arbiter of meaning'? Here, it is also useful to mention that there are literary theorists who have forcefully argued that the author is dead. The 'death of the author theory' primarily associated with Roland Barthes, places more prominence on the reader, while authors are seen as 'extremely unreliable; they often do not know what they are doing; and there is a big discrepancy between intention and result. Authorial authority is highly questionable' (J. A. Cuddon). Also relevant to Peterson's book is the 'reader response theory', which asserts that any

text, whatever it be (poem, short story, essay, scientific exposition), has no real existence until it is read... A reader completes its meaning by reading it... Thus, the reader does not have, as has been traditionally thought and accepted, a passive role; on the contrary, the reader is an active agent in the creation of meaning. (J. A. Cuddon)

The last relevant issue is the theory of 'intertextuality', which places emphasis on 'the interdependence of literary texts, the interdependence of any one literary text with all those that have gone before it' (J. A. Cuddon). These, and similar literary theories, have a bearing on any meaningful interpretation of Peterson's book.

Indeed, at the outset, Peterson states that, although this is a historical book, it is also principally about 'how texts crystallize changeable social relationships, fire people with visions of the future, and inspire them to act' (p. xi). In pursuit of this central theme, Peterson proceeds to describe and analyze the relationship that existed (and exists) between texts (of various sorts) and the readers in colonial

central Kenya. This theme is also developed by examining the centrality of language formation (forever-shifting vocabulary) and the urge to act in the advancement of the readers' interests. The principal area of his research is the colonial district of Nyeri in central Kenya.

The key chapters in the development of the book's principal themes are Chapters 2, 3 and 9. In Chapter 2, we are introduced to 'the earliest Christian converts', who apparently were 'entrepreneurs, not converts from one religion to another' (p. 34). The schooling that they acquired brought them specific benefits: access to opportunities in the colonial world and even political leadership. Chapter 3 deals with the consequences of the translation of the Bible into the Gikuyu language. The expanding class of literate Gikuyus laid claim to social and political leadership, arguing that these new cultural acquisitions entitled them 'to lead Gikuyu into a new epoch' (p. 80). There is hence an inevitable connection between literacy and the rise of nationalism under colonial rule. These two chapters raise several questions which Peterson fails to address. Specifically, it is worth recalling that not all of the literate Gikuyu entered nationalist politics. There were many who chose to oppose political agitation; their descendants would later emerge as the pillars of the Home Guard Movement opposed to the Mau Mau revolt. There is also the matter of translation. At the moment, translation and meaning is a hotly debated issue in literary theory. Does translation bestow meaning, and is this meaning closed or shifting?

The book opens and closes with a consideration of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's literary production, especially his play, *Ngaahika Ndeenda*. Peterson looks at Ngugi's works (especially those written in Gikuyu) as irrefutable proof of his central thesis. The original performance of the play in Limuru, near Ngugi's home, became a unique example of community involvement in the production and consumption of art. Ordinary peasants were cast as actors while many other peasants in the village regularly watched and critiqued both the performance and the script. This led to the final product being effectively communally authored and produced. It should, however, be noted that these were unique times in Kenya. Ngugi himself was detained immediately and this community effort at politicization through art was closed down. Although Peterson argues that Ngugi's other recent works 'are meant to be read aloud, talked about and argued with ... they are meant to start radical conversations about postcolonial politics' (p. 225), he does not provide any evidence that this has happened on any extensive basis. If this has not occurred, what does this tell us about 'reader response' and historical context? Are literary texts alone enough to launch 'radical conversations about postcolonial politics'?

This book contains within it a multiplicity of themes and sub-themes. This makes it a fairly difficult book to read. Not all of these themes, sub-divided into the nine chapters, are tidily woven together. Chapters range from 'Colonialism and comparative religion in Gikuyuland', to 'Ngugi's compositions in Gikuyu'. Linkages between chapters could have been tighter and more apparent. Since the author is, directly or indirectly, venturing into literary theory, it may have helped his case if he had provided extensive evidence of familiarity with the relevant terms and theories pertinent to his study. After reading this book, one feels that the author should have at least undertaken a mini-comparative analysis, for after all many issues discussed here also occurred in other districts in Kenya, not to mention other countries in Africa. Is this study of Nyeri unique or representative of similar developments elsewhere in Kenya and other parts of colonial Africa? What is also not clear is how Peterson's book fundamentally alters our understanding of colonialism and its impact in central Kenya, and further afield in the rest of Kenya.

Nonetheless, Peterson's book is original and provocative. At its heart, it is essentially interdisciplinary in the formulation and exploration of its main

arguments. It is an admirable, daring effort that asks the uncomfortable question of why historians have, with few exceptions, maintained a rigid and unhelpful boundary between works of literary art and historical texts. This is particularly relevant for African history which, fortunately, remains interdisciplinary, drawing on the advances in several related fields. In this book Peterson makes an impassioned plea for a reconsideration of the role of creative writing in historical reconstruction. Since 'no author writes in a vacuum', Peterson would like to see historians, and presumably other scholars, 'look beyond the margins of the book to see how interpreters restaged textualized ideas, sentences and plot lines' (p. 242).

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WUNYABARI O. MALOBA

## POLITICS, CULTURE AND KNOWLEDGE IN TANZANIA

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*In Search of a Nation: Histories of Authority and Dissidence in Tanzania.* Edited by GREGORY H. MADDOX and JAMES L. GIBLIN. Oxford: James Currey Publishers, 2005. Pp. xiv + 337. £50 cloth (ISBN 0-85255-488-5); £16.95 paperback (ISBN 0-85255-487-7).

KEY WORDS: Tanzania, knowledge, nationalism, political culture, politics.

This collection of essays was originally presented in 2001 as a *Festschrift* to honor Professor Isaria Kimambo on the occasion of his retirement from the Department of History at the University of Dar es Salaam. The editors frame the collection as a re-examination of 'the links between politics, culture and knowledge in Tanzania from the nineteenth century up to the present' (p. 2). Underlying these contributions is a sense of the 'crisis of legitimacy' that limited the authority of the colonial state and provided space for local communities to contest its power, a pattern that has been replicated in the postcolonial era. A celebration of nationalism and the nation state is not to be found here, as one might have expected a generation ago. Rather, there is a sense of discomfort that Tanzanian nationalism failed to create the unity and freedom promised at independence. The title of the book might be paraphrased as a search for a usable past, an endeavor that launched historical studies at the University of Dar es Salaam in the first decade of independence, but whose meaning is no longer entirely clear. These contributions suggest that a usable past is most likely to be found in investigations of local experiences of culture and knowledge that challenge the agenda of the modern state.

The essays are divided chronologically into precolonial, colonial, nationalist-era and post-colonial sections. They cover most regions of Tanzania, including two contributions on Zanzibar. Steven Feierman analyzes a nineteenth-century Shambaa ritual that marked the transition from one king to another, a ritual about which no single individual or clan possessed complete knowledge. Fragments of the ritual were known locally and held in secret, so that power could only be constituted socially or collectively. Edward Alpers presents a biography of a nineteenth-century 'big man', representative of a time of political ferment and economic transformation, who came to wield authority in Uluguru by uniting coastal Islamic patrilineal traditions of succession with inland matrilineal traditions that focused on the need to protect rain shrines.

Most of the contributions focus on the colonial period. Ralph Austen questions the idea that national borders were simple constructs of the colonial states in his

study of the Kagera salient, a disputed parcel of land in northwestern Tanzania from the colonial to the postcolonial periods. Austen shows that Africans were often involved in defining and preserving the border in the face of attempts to adjust it to accord with precolonial patterns of rule. Thomas Spear uses a case study from Mt. Meru to contextualize the colonial 'invention of traditions' under the rubric of Indirect Rule. He demonstrates how both modernity and tradition could be used to shape power at the local level owing to the colonial need to achieve a basic level of legitimacy in order to make colonialism work. Gregory Maddox presents a study of Mazengo, a colonial chief in Ugogo, whose authority was always considered to be suspect at the local level, but who helped to legitimate the nationalist party of TANU by symbolically handing power over to Julius Nyerere at the time of independence. Underlying this action was a sense that the postcolonial state did not achieve any real legitimacy since Mazengo was never a true chief. Jamie Monson demonstrates how local written histories in Mahenge District were used to contest local politics in the late colonial period. Claims to ethnic identity as a basis of legitimacy were translated into a language of national unity as these local struggles dovetailed with the nationalist movement during the 1950s. Jim Giblin uses a case study from Njombe District to demonstrate that the divergence between the lived experience of family life and the normative view of lineage and authority propagated by chiefs and colonial officials created a disjuncture that made it easier for the nationalist movement to contest chiefly authority and depose chiefs after independence. Marcia Wright posits the need to understand the experiences of labor migrants from a border region of southwestern Tanzania to sisal plantations of the northeast in order to grasp how the nationalist movement was received quickly in a backwater region. She suggests that the intangible experiences of freedom, autonomy, exposure to new values, forms of entertainment and dress politicized migrants' consciousnesses and made them receptive to nationalist sentiments.

The nationalist decade occupies the attention of many of the contributions in the volume. John Iliffe's essay highlights the relative weakness of British security forces in 1950s Tanganyika, frustrating their efforts to delay Tanganyikan independence so that it would not in turn expedite independence in eastern and central Africa. Lawrence Mbogoni analyzes press censorship and a case of sedition in Zanzibar in 1954 to expose the vulnerabilities of a colonial regime threatened by Mau Mau in Kenya and the specter of international communism, even as Zanzibari Arabs failed to move beyond racial politics to create a broad-based nationalism. Thomas Burgess argues for 'youth' as an analytical construct to help explain the trajectory of Zanzibari nationalism, especially the revolutionary and socialist forms it took during the 1960s. James Brennan shows that the Tanganyikan ANC, which offered a feeble alternative to TANU in the first years of independence, failed to mobilize an effective counter-hegemonic discourse to TANU that might have mustered labor unions, agricultural cooperatives and deposed chiefs to oppose TANU's growing tendency toward authoritarianism and intolerance of dissent. The late Susan Geiger suggests that Swahili identity provided a framework for an inclusive nationalism that was largely the product of activist Muslim women. The contributions of E. S. Atieno Odhiambo and Yusuf Lawi suggest the most unease at the state of modern historiography. Odhiambo's reflection on the Tanzanian Mohammed Hussein Bayume, who began life in German-ruled Tanzania in 1893 and presumably died in a Nazi concentration camp, laments both that the archival record has erased by omission stories of similar 'Unknown Africans' and that modern Africanist historiography no longer makes room for 'icons and heroes'. Lawi's overview of Tanzanian historiography, from the colonial erasure of the African past to modern historical abstractions, concludes that history writing



provides little meaning for the bulk of the Tanzanian population. A glimmer of hope can be teased out of Kelly Askew's analysis of state efforts to create a national cultural aesthetic after independence. While the state attempted to homogenize and synchronize dance and music to serve the ideological needs of nation building, it also had to accommodate itself to a popular aesthetic that 'it cannot defeat'.

A review like this cannot do justice to the complexity of the essays presented here. It is, however, worth pointing out what is missing from this fine collection. The material world of work, production and consumption shows up only in the background, and while many of the scholars acknowledge the forces of global capitalism at work in their studies, none make it an object of analysis. Nevertheless, in the ongoing search for a usable past, the contributions here reveal the limitations of state hegemony and the richness of local bases of knowledge in giving meaning to the past.

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THADDEUS SUNSERI

### THE CONTRIBUTION OF AFRICAN-AMERICANS TO THE CREATION OF KENYA'S EDUCATED CLASS

doi:10.1017/S0021853706442432

*Western Educated Elites in Kenya, 1900–1963: The African-American Factor.* By JIM C. HARPER II. New York: Routledge, 2006. Pp. viii + 193. No price given (ISBN 0-415-97730-4).

KEY WORDS: Kenya, African diaspora, biography, class, education, international relations.

This book, published in a series edited by Molefi Asante, aims to illuminate the contribution that African-Americans made to the creation of Kenya's educated class. Its focus is on the 'student airlifts' of the late 1950s and early 1960s, when hundreds of Kenyans went on scholarships to attend university in the United States. This tale is important in its own right, and Harper enlivens the story with short biographies of prominent Kenyans who participated in the scheme. Unfortunately, Harper encumbers the book with long excurses about education in precolonial Africa, about the missionary impact on African thought and about Mau Mau and Kenyan nationalism. In none of these areas has he done adequate research. What might have been a tightly focused article on postcolonial Kenya's civil service thereby balloons into a poorly conceived book.

The text begins with a chapter about 'traditional' and Islamic education in Kenya. The narrative is structured by the ahistorical truisms of structure-functionalist anthropology. Harper invokes the notional homestead, where parents taught their children how to govern their behavior, and where the initiation system 'provided the conditions for the transmission of values, beliefs, customs and religion that were passed on to succeeding generations' (p. 27). How young and old might have contended over new forms of knowledge and social practice is not explained in Harper's romantic account. The following chapter documents the 'rise of the asomi [readers]'. Harper struggles mightily to illuminate African-American agency in colonial Kenya's history of education. He focuses on Molonket ole Sempele, a Maasai convert who traveled to the United States in 1908 to attend Boydton Bible Institute in Virginia. Disgusted at the lynching of

African-Americans, ole Sempele is said to have returned to Kenya, broken away from the Africa Inland Mission (AIM), and founded the Independent Maasai African Church. As evidence of what Harper calls the 'emerging pan-Africanist movement', ole Sempele's biography appears no less than five times in Harper's book (pp. 4, 8–9, 38–9, 60–1, 108). But in reality ole Sempele's career was rather less clear-cut than Harper suggests. He had a close relationship with AIM missionaries through the 1930s. Factual errors aside, Harper has very little to say about ole Sempele's relationship with the broader swathe of Maasai political thought, blithely assuring us that he 'remained a colossal figure in Kenyan nationalism' until his death (p. 61). Harper says nothing about the debates over gender, property and masculinity that mission education in Maasailand generated (ole Sempele and other educated men were commonly scorned as *ormeek*, 'strangers' of doubtful virility and character). How far educated elites in Maasailand and elsewhere in colonial Kenya convinced doubting constituents to follow their lead remains obscure in Harper's account.

Harper finds firmer footing in the book's later chapters, which study the late 1950s and early 1960s 'student airlifts' to the United States. Drawing on the archive of the American Society of African Culture and the private papers of African-American politicians, Harper chronicles Tom Mboya's efforts to leverage scholarships from recalcitrant American philanthropists and officials. Mboya first visited the United States in 1956, organizing short-term training courses for Kenya's labor unionists. By 1957, he had struck up an alliance with William Scheinman, an airplane manufacturer and philanthropist, who funded the first air tickets for Kenyan students. By 1959, 451 Kenyans were studying in the United States (p. 84). The 1960 airlift involved 222 students, most of them from Kenya. This outpouring of philanthropic and governmental largesse was driven by Americans' worries over communist influence, which was thought to be stalking newly independent African nations. Many of the students educated in the United States returned to Kenya in the early 1960s to participate in the postcolonial work of nation-building. Harper's final substantive chapter reconstructs the biographies of prominent Kenyans who studied in America, profiling Hilary Boniface Ng'weno, editor of the *Weekly Review*; Nicholas Murathe Mugo, ambassador to Ethiopia and France; Dr Njoroge Mundai, the first Kenyan to qualify for the doctorate in medicine; and several others.

In an era when Africa seems so distant from the American public's concerns, it is good to be reminded of a time when Kenya mattered on the world stage. But in his focus on the international political scene, Harper lifts Kenya's elites out of Kenya itself. His book says startlingly little about Kenyan politics, about the clannish, parochial uses that Mboya and his colleague Kariuki Njiri made of the American scholarship program. The book, moreover, says very little about the indigenous sources of postcolonial Kenya's pro-capitalist policy. Harper credits the American role in the education of Kenya's elites with developing the 'solid, seemingly everlasting relationship between the two countries' (p. 3). But as John Lonsdale has shown, Jomo Kenyatta's opposition to socialism was derived also from Gikuyu thought, with its historically learned scorn for laziness.

Harper's book helps us glimpse a trans-continental network through which resources, ideas and people moved. But with his eye firmly fixed on the 'African American factor', Harper ignores the local networks that shaped the biographies of Kenya's elites.

## SHORTER NOTICES

doi:10.1017/S0021853706452439

*The Transatlantic Slave Trade: A History, Revised Edition.* By JAMES RAWLEY with STEPHEN D. BEHRENDT. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005. Pp. xviii + 441. £38.5 (ISBN 0-8032-3961-0).

KEY WORDS: Precolonial, historiography, research, slave trade.

James Rawley's survey of the trans-Atlantic slave trade first appeared in 1981. The author was thus able to summarize the first decade of research and debate following the 1969 publication of Philip Curtin's census. Engagingly written and clearly organized, Rawley's overview served to guide general readers through the main issues in the various European national slave trades, taking particular interest in the English and American trades. This revised edition, produced with the assistance of Stephen Behrendt, provides some updates. Its appearance coincides sadly with the passing of Professor Rawley. The book still provides a good summary of the Atlantic slave trade, especially for the eighteenth century. While research has added substantial new material relevant to the chapters on the early Portuguese and Spanish slave trades, the later chapters of the book – on Dutch, French, English and American trades up to 1808 – may be seen as basically sound.

The limitation of the book, however, is that it does not account for the changes that have arisen, in the past quarter-century, in the understanding of slave trade beyond that of the northern European powers. That is, the book does not discuss in any detail the Atlantic slave trade of the nineteenth century, the slave trade from Angola, the links of oceanic slave trade with slave trade on the African and American continents or the slave trade of the Indian Ocean. Use of the Rawley book, in teaching and research, thus makes most sense when combined with works addressing some or all of these issues.

The changes in this edition are small, as an attempt to bring it fully up-to-date would have involved a thorough rewriting. The new edition includes some appropriate updating of language, so that 'the Negro slave traffic' has become 'the traffic in enslaved Africans'. Secondly, while the original work had no bibliography, the revised edition adds a list of nearly 140 works written since 1980. The selection of works, out of the many candidates for inclusion, gives particular attention to works of the Behrend–Eltis–Klein team that edited the Cambridge slave-trade CD. Thirdly, the table summarizing Curtin's 1969 estimates of the total volume of trans-Atlantic slave trade (p. 16) is balanced by a table summarizing David Eltis's 2001 estimates. Despite differences in handling of the Old World slave trade, the two estimates appear almost equal. The forthcoming revision of the Cambridge CD, however, will show substantial expansion in the estimates for Portuguese and Brazilian slave trade: the consensus estimate of the trans-Atlantic total has indeed crept upward.

In sum the Rawley survey, while now far from definitive, reminds readers of the strong start to the trans-Atlantic slave-trade literature, and the current edition, when set in context, enables one to see that this literature continues to develop productively.

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*The Atlantic Slave Trade*. By JOHANNES POSTMA. Westport CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2003. Paperback, Gainesville FL: University Press of Florida, 2005. Pp. xxii + 177. \$24.5 (ISBN 0-8130-2906-6).

KEY WORDS: Historiography, slavery, slave trade.

Johannes Postma's accessible overview of the trans-Atlantic slave trade is part of the new series 'Greenwood Guide to Historical Events, 1500–1900' and is now available in paperback from the University Press of Florida. Geared towards the advanced high school and university markets, *The Atlantic Slave Trade* contains six brief chapters, biographical sketches of 17 'significant persons in the Atlantic slave trade' and extracts from 13 documents, c. 1700–1820s, published previously. Postma also includes useful supplemental information: a chronology of events concerning slavery and the slave trade, 1441–1888; two maps; ten black-and-white illustrations; a glossary of 22 terms; and a short annotated bibliography of works through 2003.

Students new to the history of the slave trade will benefit from Postma's skill in summarizing recent interpretations without excessive historiographical discussion. His overview chapter informs readers about the longevity of slavery in human history, slavery in its African context, European slave-trading companies, slavery and the colonization of the Americas and the international efforts to abolish the trade. In Chapter 2 the reader follows the path of enslaved Africans forced to migrate from the interior to coast, to slaving ship, to port in the Americas. Postma's statistical chapter, 'Origins, destinations, and mortality', incorporates data, in three tables, contained in the trans-Atlantic slave trade CD-ROM archive (1999) and from his own re-estimation of the size of the Dutch slave trade (2003). Readers then learn about the international complexity of the slave-trading business. The abolition movement and the legacy of the 350-year trans-Atlantic slave trade ends his thematic approach.

Whereas Postma's six chapter topics summarize effectively major themes on the slave trade, one could quibble with his selection of 'significant persons'. Of the 17, 12 are of African descent (at least 5 born in Africa and forced into the trans-Atlantic slave trade in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) – indeed a useful corrective to studies that silence African life histories. Postma's discussion of Essjerrie Ettin (c. 1740–69), based on Dutch archival information, brings to light the name of an Asante who instigated a slave revolt on a Dutch ship in 1769 – which he paid for with his life. The 5 non-Africans include Bartolomé de Las Casas and four eighteenth-century abolitionists. For historical balance, perhaps Postma could have added biographical sketches on leading slaving merchants or surgeons; Londoner Humphry Morice (d. 1731) and Bristol surgeon Alexander Falconbridge (d. 1792) come to mind. To fill the seventeenth-century gap, Postma could have summarized the lives of important slaving officials such as Dutchman Balthazar Coymans, a leading monopolist, or Jean-Baptiste Du Casse, the principal architect of the French slave trade.

Johannes Postma's *Atlantic Slave Trade* will find its way onto many high school and university reading lists. It complements David Northrup (ed.), *The Atlantic Slave Trade* (2nd edition, Lexington MA: 2002), which contains secondary source selections as well as extracts from contemporary accounts. Combined, the two works provide a solid foundation of primary sources and discussion of major persons, topics and debates concerning the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

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*Historical Dictionary of Madagascar*. 2nd edition. By PHILIP M. ALLEN and MAUREEN COVELL. *Historical Dictionaries of Africa*, No. 98. Lanham MD, Toronto, Oxford: Scarecrow Press, 2005. Pp. lxxxiii + 420. \$90 (ISBN 0-8108-4636-5).

KEY WORDS: Madagascar, dictionaries.

Philip Allen and Maureen Covell have produced a useful companion for novice and specialist alike. Entries are concise, packed with information and, at times, even lively. There is an appendix that lists major political parties and even acronyms and abbreviations to get the researcher through the alphabet soup of post-independence politics. The most thoughtful addition is a reasonably comprehensive bibliography arranged by subject, though there are no entries for the considerable number of scholarly works in Malagasy. A couple of good maps appear, one showing major cities and 'ethnic groups', and the other showing major cities and provinces. A map showing topographic features would have been welcomed, considering the Red Island's size and climatic variation. One might need several attempts to find information on a given topic because topics are oddly broken up. 'Economy' and 'industry' are separate entries, and 'banking system' has its own essay while 'nationalism' presents much economic information. 'External trade' receives its due, but there is no 'internal trade' nor even 'trade'. Though it is a 'historical' dictionary, the *Historical Dictionary of Madagascar* focuses resolutely on the present. A recent president, Ratziraka, receives roughly ten times the space of Radama, the first Merina ruler to claim all of Madagascar's coasts in the 1820s. One wonders if a historical dictionary of France would devote ten times the space to Chirac as it does to Napoleon. Perhaps Radama's cramped space reflects the popular sentiment that aims to diminish the Merina's role in the history of Madagascar. From the dictionary's 'Chronology', which begins in AD 400 and ends in 2004, one could never learn that Radama's Merina empire ever existed. This should not detract from the volume's value, especially if the more historically minded reader uses it as a beginning rather than as an authority.

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*An African Trading Empire: The Story of Susman Brothers & Wulfsohn, 1901-2005*. By HUGH MACMILLAN. London: I. B. Tauris, 2005. Pp. xi + 492. No price given (ISBN: 1-85043-853-6).

KEY WORDS: Southern Africa, Central Africa, biography, business, colonial.

The book by Hugh Macmillan is a study of Elie and Harry Susman, Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe who built a very successful business empire in south-central Africa from the turn of the twentieth century. It traces the brothers' history from their Eastern European roots, through their beginnings as cattle traders in Barotseland in the early years of the twentieth century, to the growth of their operations into a considerable business empire involved in trading, transport and ranching.

Macmillan documents the many challenges the Susman brothers confronted and how they dealt with them during a period in which south-central Africa was undergoing dramatic and far-reaching political and economic changes under European colonialism. He also shows how, in the 1940s, a fellow Jew, also of

Eastern European origins, Harry Wulfohn, went into partnership with the brothers and, together, they expanded the business operations to include ranching, meat processing and marketing, rural and urban retail activities, baking, timber processing and textile manufacturing, horticulture and financial services so that Susman Brothers & Wulfohn became a household name in Zambia and its neighbours.

*An African Trading Empire* is a well-presented biography of a Jewish business family in an African setting and a celebration of the Jewish businessmen's ingenuity, organizational ability, business acumen and tenacity in difficult situations and conditions. It is also an insightful and highly informative study in the social and economic history of colonial and postcolonial south-central Africa and deals with various themes central to recent European and African history, such as European imperialism and the scramble for Africa, the Jewish diaspora and its impact on society and economy in south-central Africa, the rise and fall of the Central African Federation, the emergence and development of African nationalism and the struggle against colonialism, decolonization, the postcolonial dispensation, and the region in the era of globalization.

Using a vast wealth of private and public sources, the book provides a detailed, insightful and sensitive, if sometimes glorified, history of the Susman brothers and their business partners and their role and activities as citizens in a dynamic colonial and postcolonial setting. This book is a very welcome contribution to African historiography, particularly as it pertains to the little-studied subject of Jews in south-central Africa.

The book is highly recommended to scholars of the social and economic history and business history of south-central Africa, students of the Jewish diaspora and the role and contribution of Jews in Africa during the colonial era and beyond, and to anyone interested in understanding the forces that helped shape the history of the region in the last hundred or so years. The book is written in easily accessible language, suitable for both the specialist and the lay reader.

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*All'inferno e ritorno: storie di deportati tra Italia ed Eritrea in epoca coloniale.* By MARCO LENCI. Pisa: Biblioteca Franco Serantini, 2004. Pp. 143. €13, paperback (ISBN 88-86389-95-7).

KEY WORDS: Eritrea, colonial, nationalism, resistance.

This is an absorbing little book by a well-established historian of Italian colonialism in Eritrea. Beautifully written, the volume explores the gestation and workings of deportation policies to and from Eritrea in both liberal and fascist Italy. The first two chapters – revised versions of recently published articles – deal, respectively, with the vicissitudes of Eritrean deportees in Italy between 1886 and 1893, and the moving story of Menghistu Isahac, a Rome-based Eritrean university student who, having spoken openly against Mussolini in 1936, was interned in Ventotene Island alongside such celebrated anti-fascist militants as Ernesto Rossi and future Republican President Sandro Pertini. The third, original chapter focuses instead on the short-lived (1898–99) and shockingly haphazard attempt to turn Assab, Italy's first colonial possession along the Eritrean coast, into a place of confinement for both common criminals and victims of the 'anti-anarchist' crackdown of the late 1890s.

The author makes no apology for his obvious allergy to theory. As in so many of his previous works, Lenci is after telling a good story and telling it well. While Foucauldian historians may find this unpalatable, few readers will fail to be impressed by the meticulousness of the empirical research that informs *All'inferno*. The book's major strength, however, also accounts for some of its occasional weaknesses. Due to his almost exclusive reliance on written colonial records, for instance, Lenci is unable adequately to clarify the social profiles and anti-colonial activities (if any) of Eritrean deportees in the late nineteenth century. On a different note, one wishes that Lenci had temporarily pushed aside his index cards to provide some background information on the emergence of Eritrean nationalism. Having been told that Menghistu originated from a 'pro-Ethiopian' evangelical family and that his anti-fascist maturation owed much to the Italian invasion of Abyssinia in 1935, this non-specialist reviewer struggled to make sense of Menghistu's conversion to the cause of Eritrean independence upon his return home in 1945. But these are minor quibbles. Overall, *All'inferno* remains a remarkable achievement and an eminently readable book.

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