

area had failed to claim this baobab for his own people because his wife had not served him breakfast in time. The location of the baobab marks the first Kaba settlement (pp. 34–5). Osborn notes that some accounts characterize the chief's wife as 'being from a different ethnicity or slave status'. She concludes from this that 'This episode also underscores how the choices and comportment of a woman could create long-lasting political consequences, . . . the subtext of male anxiety that runs through these stories suggests that those gender and status differentials could also easily soften and collapse. It was possible, in other words, for an unruly woman or a recalcitrant slave to create a fundamental threat to the household and thus to the state' (p. 48).

This reading is problematic. Such stories describe a political system; they are not evidence of a once peaceful and pacifist life in which women had some influence. Firstly, there is the issue of internal validity: these stories are composed around standard narrative themes, as Osborn mentions, and therefore there is no reason to treat the baobab story and the women's actions as data of different kinds. Secondly, there is the issue of external validity: as the state was under pressure in the first half of the nineteenth century, oral traditions should be studied in relation to the concerns of Kankan's Suwarian elite and to the question whether Kankan's elite could cope with this pressure by means of its particular marriage system. In my opinion, Osborn's interpretation of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is not simply 'optimistic', (pp. 14–15), it is invalid. It not only lacks supporting data, which is a prerequisite for using oral traditions as sources to reconstruct the past. It also denies the golden rule of oral tradition research that in order to study the past, the point of departure should be the present.

Kankan's oral traditions have always depicted women as instruments in the elite's alliance politics – these are political myths by men, about men, and for men. There is no basis for Osborn's idea that marriage in precolonial Kankan was an institution that provided women with some prestige and agency, as they became part of a household, which, according to Osborn, was the basic unit of the state. I wonder whether a comparison with neighbouring polities would have prevented Osborn from describing this unique – but questionable – process of masculinization of society. I mention here Richard Roberts work on Kankan's neighbouring warrior states and Mahir Şaul's study of the Watara war houses. In my view, Osborn has written a book that dramatically demonstrates the marginal position of women in the *entire* period of its analysis and which documents how Kankan's elite voiced the political tension it found itself facing in the *nineteenth* century.

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NOT WINSTON CHURCHILL'S WAR

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Slaves of Fortune: Sudanese Soldiers & the River War, 1896–1898. By RONALD M. LAMOTHE. Woodbridge, UK: James Currey, 2011. Pp. vii + 227. \$80, hardback (ISBN 978-1-84701-042-1).

KEY WORDS: Sudan, military, slavery, social.

For most general readers and a few historians, Winston Churchill's *The River War* remains the definitive statement on Great Britain's campaign in the Sudan against Khalifa 'Abdallahi's Mahdist forces in 1898. The young, inexperienced,

and ambitious Churchill joined Kitchener's expedition in hope of making a name for himself as a subaltern in the British army and as a correspondent for the *Morning Post* and, at the same, to gather material for a book which he could sell to a large British audience which thirsted for tales of heroic deeds in exotic places. The victory at Omdurman provided Churchill with actual details which novelists like G. A. Henty and H. R. Haggard often had to conjure up: gallant actions of British officers, a glorious charge by the 21st Lancers, and fierce and wild resistance offered by 'Dervishes'. In the end, Churchill concluded, civilization and the 'arms of science' had vanquished the 'barbarians'.

In *Slaves of Fortune: Sudanese Soldiers & the River War 1896-1898*, Ronald M. Lamothe revisits the Sudan Campaign and, in general, Sudan in the British imperial project from the reorganization of the Anglo-Egyptian army after 1882 to the January 1900 mutiny of Sudanese soldiers at the Omdurman barracks. Lamothe concludes that the decisive factor in the defeat of the Khalifa was not the British army nor modern weaponry but the discipline, ability, and bravery of the Sudanese infantry battalions, a group which Churchill almost entirely overlooked in his account of the war.

Slaves of Fortune attempts to do many things. Lamothe is very interested in writing a social history of the Sudanese soldiers. He examines their status as 'slave-soldiers' and how it evolved over time, and he investigates their complex racial, religious, and regional identities. In examining the daily lives of soldiers, Lamothe reaches into the realm of the 'new military history'. Unlike British or Egyptian soldiers, for example, the Sudanese were given special dispensation to bring along camp followers and Lamothe examines the formal and informal relationships of these civilians and the soldiers: women cooked, washed, mended, built huts, brewed beer, and provided comfort. In examining martial race theory and British/Sudanese relationships, Lamothe adds to the historiography of imperial history. He rejects the traditional view that white British soldiers, shaped by Victorian sensibilities, could only see their social inferiors when they interacted with the Sudanese, and instead highlights complex relationships marked by camaraderie and competition. And finally, Lamothe provides new insights into the Battle of Omdurman and addresses traditional military subjects like tactics and command.

Lamothe does not try to hide the major historiographical weakness of *Slaves of Fortune*, namely the limited depth and the variety of the primary sources he utilizes. Most of his sources are published and non-published diaries and memoirs, campaign histories, and journalistic accounts, as well as official materials found in London, which have been used by many others in the past. Lamothe has also tapped into the papers of General F. Reginald Wingate, who spent much of his career along the Nile, at the University of Durham. But unfortunately, Lamothe admits, the National Records Office in Khartoum yielded mostly British sources and he was unable to navigate or gain access to any significant documents in Cairo. What he is left with, although he makes excellent use of them, are a handful of narratives and memoirs left behind by Sudanese slave-soldiers.

Slaves of Fortune is an important contribution to the history of Great Britain's campaigns along the Nile from 1896-8. Lamothe has shifted the traditional emphasis on British regiments and British officers to the Sudanese regiments. He challenges Churchill's Tommy Atkins versus Fuzzy Wuzzy opposition by reminding the reader that nearly two-thirds of all British troops were either Egyptian or Sudanese, and that slave-soldiers fought in both the British vanguard and in the Khalifa's. He has created a complex portrait of men who fought and played sport together, who competed with British regiments for battle honors, who served as scouts, porters and military recruiters, and who rarely questioned their

lifetime service in the Anglo-Egyptian army. General readers of military history as well as scholars will learn much from *Slaves of Fortune*.

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A SUCCESSION OF FALSE DAWNS IN KENYA

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Kenya: Between Hope and Despair, 1963–2011. By DANIEL BRANCH. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011. Pp. xi + 366. \$35, hardback (ISBN 978-0-300-14876-3).

KEY WORDS: Kenya, decolonization, governance, nation-states, postcolonial politics.

Daniel Branch's political history of Kenya since independence deals with the consequences of choices: paths taken in the mid-1960s could not later be retraced; rejected alternatives mutated to extremes but never entirely disappeared. Branch's economical and lucid account follows the working out of what at times seems an inevitable tragedy of unrealised hopes and angry despair, especially if read against the deeper background of Kenya's colonial past.

The first choice facing Kenya's new rulers was between building a nation and securing the state: Kenya's new rulers chose the latter. In 1963, Kenya needed social stability and economic growth. Both the old masters and the new rulers deemed the centralised state best able to deliver both. A field administration, accustomed to implementing orders, and a central bureaucracy were regarded as far more reliable as instruments of order and development than politicians and ideologues. 'Firm government' of the colonial kind was, in any case, all that most Kenyans had ever known. A *majimbo* alternative of strong regions and weak centre, created during the transfer of power to assuage 'minority' fears, was jettisoned after independence, only to reappear two decades later in the context of a discourse of autochthony rather than as a constitutional contrivance. The nation, meanwhile, was left to build itself. Kenya's many communities were too fractious and too jealous of their autonomy to be obedient 'nationalists': citizens would always be householders first. Perhaps working for oneself would, in time, create a shared 'Kenyan' identity of freedom, responsibility, and mutual accountability, but the odds were against this and the state did not intervene.

The second fateful choice was the decision to opt for the politics of 'recognition' (which treated communities separately and overlooked inequality) rather than of 'redistribution' (which would have looked to class rather than ethnicity to allocate resources and promote inclusion). The logic of 'recognition' encouraged the development of patronage networks in which members of the ruling elite played the key mediating roles and benefitted from privileged access to power and resources which they deployed to build and deliver support in the localities. Strong government, with carefully calibrated access to power at the top and competition between patrons would, perhaps, ensure that patronage systems would support rather than threaten central authority and would discipline the citizenry. A populist, but hardly 'socialist' call for redistribution was crushed in the late 1960s, along with the party that advocated it, but the redistributive ideal lived on in increasingly radical and 'subversive' demands for social justice by the marginalised, the dispossessed, and the disappointed. By the mid-1970s, the party had largely been replaced by