

AIDS, proverbs in relation to health events, abortion, food storage and processing, Yoruba agriculture, women in Yoruba culture, age stratification and marriage, domestic gender roles, Yoruba associations, dual residence patterns, school curricula. While a good many (it has to be said) are rather slight, there is also much interesting material scattered about them, particularly when the focus shifts from the pan-Yoruba level to particular communities and locales.

In their introduction, Falola and Genova valiantly try to draw out some overarching themes. They see the Yoruba as now standing at a historical crossroads. Behind them stands what they call 'elite history': the creation of a modern Yoruba identity, to which Western education is central, initiated by the pioneer Christian elite in the nineteenth century. The Revd. Samuel Johnson's great *History*, the classic studies of J. F. A. Ajayi and of E. A. Ayandele (to whom this volume is dedicated), and the political program of Chief Awolowo are key moments in its realization. Since Awolowo's death in 1987, and particularly since the falling-out of his political heirs and the disappointment of Yoruba hopes under the Obasanjo presidency (1999–2007), the sense of 'Whither next?' has grown in intensity. Its further backdrop is a widespread loss of faith in the Nigerian state (to which the turn to Shari'a in the Muslim North is also a response). These issues are addressed in two highly symptomatic chapters, which read less as academic analysis than as engaged advocacy, though they are full of historical references. Jare Ajayi articulates the frequently heard demand for a 'national conference' to re-frame the Nigerian state. J. B. B. Ojo, in a strongly polemical vein, expresses the widespread view that, in addition to their own internal factionalism, the particular enemy of the Yoruba project has been the Hausa-Fulani establishment of the North, privileged in the British construction of the Nigerian state. Both Ojo and Ajayi view contemporary conflicts through mytho-historical templates, notably the betrayal of the legitimate Yoruba leader (Alafin Aole, Awolowo) by a disloyal subordinate allied to the North (Afonja, Akintola). Complementary to, but in some tension with, the notion of the Yoruba as firmly wedded to a 'progressive' politics is the idea (expressed by several contributors) that the moral deficiencies of the present are due to the abandonment of 'the wisdom of our ancestors, our traditions, our family values'. But there is not enough attention to the conflict of values here, nor to those – such as the Bamidele Muslims – who clearly don't buy into the 'enlightenment' narrative developed by the Christian elite. This makes me wonder how widely and fully it is shared by Yoruba Muslims more generally; but the answer cannot be divined from the several essays in this volume by self-evidently Muslim contributors. The reader closes the book with a sense that much remains to be said.

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## ZIMBABWE'S LANDSCAPE AS A FIELD OF IMAGINATION, SIGNIFICATION AND AESTHETICS

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*From Wilderness Vision to Farm Invasions: Conservation and Development in Zimbabwe's South-East Lowveld.* By WILLIAM WOLMER. Oxford: James Currey; Harare: Weaver, 2007. Pp. 246. £17.95, paperback (ISBN 978-0-852-55436-4).

KEY WORDS: Zimbabwe, environment, land, white settlement.

William Wolmer's work stands out among a handful of recent books integrating the material and symbolic dimensions of land in Zimbabwe. Scholarship of the

colonial and postcolonial periods has long focused on the visceral and obvious turf battles between blacks and whites, and between both of them and the state. Even now – as Mugabe's 'land reform' program has ruined the economy – one could be forgiven for treating soil and water as objects pure and simple. Set against this conventional wisdom, then, Wolmer portrays Zimbabwe's landscape as a field of imagination, signification and aesthetics. He concentrates on a region known as the South-East Lowveld, the sump of Zimbabwe, where it drains into the Save and Limpopo rivers. From the 1890s, Europeans have represented this zone in extreme terms: as pristine wilderness, lawless waste, ideal cattle country and/or as an Arcadia for irrigated sugarcane. The very number and plasticity of these visions attests to the power of symbolic forms.

But Wolmer steers clear of naive social construction. Adopting a position of critical realism, he indicates where and when hydrology, biology and epidemiology have contributed to the success or failure of elite visions. The chapter on cattle and their diseases is particularly convincing. The late nineteenth-century outbreak of rinderpest decimated both domesticated stock and wild buffalo, pushing viruses, parasites and their vectors clear out of the South-East Lowveld. Africans redoubled their herds, and white settlers later did the same. Initially, Shangaan- and English-speakers co-existed relatively free of conflict: European ranches were vast enough and stocking rates still low enough to accommodate large numbers of African herdsmen living under the most informal of tenancies. This history of bovine-based compromise complements the bulk of more crop-focused studies of land alienation and eviction in Southern Africa. Rare to begin with, détente began to disintegrate with the rise of foot-and-mouth disease in the 1930s. Ranch-owners sought to protect their herds – and ensure access to restrictive European beef markets – by segregating them from African herds. The state's Veterinary Service quarantined large zones and lobbied effectively for the eradication of wildlife from the vicinity of ranches. Such rules systematically pushed African-owned herds out of world trade and to the margins of viability. The Lowveld became (white) cattle country – until, that is, whites changed their point of view. In search of the increasingly lucrative post-independence tourism market, they destocked the cattle and restocked with wild game. Wolmer narrates this multiplex relationship between viruses, ungulates and people with sensitivity and due attention to the agency of each party (or, in Bruno Latour's terms, each 'actant').

This spirit of equivalence, however, draws Wolmer into occasional ambiguity. At two points, he draws parallels between black and white attitudes that, upon closer examination, appear problematic. In introducing the concept of 'landscape', he argues against those who have reserved it for painters, poets, and chiefly Europeans (p. 42). Shangaan, too, value the South-East Lowveld as 'a web of people across space' (p. 52). In support of this contention, Wolmer details hunting, grazing and religious practices all interwoven with the land-forms of the Save and Limpopo catchments. Still – however rich these meanings are – they do not necessarily add up to a *concept* of landscape. Such an abstraction would contain values and measures of wide application. They would allow Shangaan to appreciate – or not – other places they visit or observe through photographs. Perhaps, some or all Shangaan do hold such ideals with respect to topography, vegetation and so on, but Wolmer does not delve into them. Indeed, the 'visions' for the South-East Lowveld have derived entirely from whites.

So has the South-East Lowveld itself: the parallel between black and white approaches also unravels on the question of scale. Before the 1890s, there was no 'South-East Lowveld'. The first settlers 'made' this region when they described it

as 'unfit for white occupation', and remade it when they developed ambitions involving development and/or tourism. Ranchers, such as Clive Stockil, organizer of the Save Valley Conservancy, marketed the Lowveld as a scenic destination. More recently, proponents of the Great Limpopo Transboundary Conservation Area (about which Wolmer has written more elsewhere) have recharted a three-country eco-zone. Shangaan geography, on the other hand, is both more local and more cosmopolitan. Women may stay in their communal lands, especially in light of longstanding regulations against transhumance. Men mostly work for a stretch in South African industry. As migrant laborers, they exit and enter the South-East Lowveld at will, perhaps not even recognizing it as a relevant unit. Surely, their 'web of people' crosses the Limpopo and extends as far south as 'Joni' (Johannesburg). The post-2000 land reform – which Wolmer analyzes in rare detail – has likely further jumbled this multiplicity of spatial scales operating among his subjects.

Notwithstanding these quibbles, *From Wilderness Vision to Farm Invasions* documents the production of and production in the South-East Lowveld with an insight and verve sure to be appreciated among scholars, students and policy-makers.

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## A REMARKABLE INTRODUCTION TO A REMARKABLE COLLECTION

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*Bushmen in a Victorian World: The remarkable story of the Bleek–Lloyd Collection of Bushman Folklore.* By ANDREW BANK. Cape Town: Double Story, 2006. Pp. 422. R2,600, paperback (ISBN 1-77013-091-8).

KEY WORDS: Southern Africa, sources.

There can be few scholars – of Khoisan studies, rock art or Southern African history – who have not heard of the collection of Bushman (or San) folklore that was recorded by the linguist Wilhelm Bleek, together with his sister-in-law Lucy Lloyd, in Cape Town in the 1870s. The stories contained in these priceless manuscripts not only record all that remains of an extinct language – that of the /Xam hunter-gatherers of the northern Cape – they also hold the key, the Rosetta stone as it were, to deciphering the obscure messages that were painted and etched on the rock surfaces of Southern Africa over a period of thousands of years. It was these tales of mantises and maidens, elands and ichneumans that enabled the archaeologist David Lewis-Williams to posit the hypothesis that the rock art of Southern Africa was largely religious in nature and that it represented the experience of being in a state of trance. It was these memories, dreams and reflections, obtained from a handful of Bushmen convicts from Cape Town's breakwater prison, that enhanced the ability of anthropologists and folklorists (like Hewitt, Guenther and Biesele) to understand the mental universe of contemporary hunter-gatherer societies. And it was the poignant autobiographical details of these doomed people, momentarily rescued from oblivion by Bleek and Lloyd, that inspired the artist Pippa Skotnes to produce a number of exceptional books, art