

## Reviews

**Cultural Transformation and Human Rights in Africa** edited by  
ABDULLAHI A. AN-NA'IM  
London: Zed Books, 2002. Pp. 269, US\$25.00 (pbk.).  
DOI: 10.1017/S0022278X04210552

This book is a timely addition to the debate on the universal application of human rights. It proceeds from the assumption that enforcing compliance with universal standards is not only difficult, but that the very idea that there should be universal standards is itself controversial and under threat. Using the concept of 'culture' as an analytical and organisational tool, contributors to the volume seeks to resolve this dilemma by giving specificity and relevance to conventional concepts of 'sovereignty' and 'domestic jurisdiction'. The argument is simple: universal human rights principles and claims can gain acceptance when appropriated contextually, leading to cultural transformation. This approach to human rights highlights what seems to be a central truth: whatever politicians or philosophers may say or do, it is on the strength of *popular* support for universal human rights that the idea will flourish or die. Conversely, 'globalisation' and adaptation are similarly changing all cultures to make human rights norms more compatible. Thus, An-Na'im and Hammond argue in the first of eight chapters that blanket rejection of Western rights norms, *per se* (because they are putatively incompatible with other cultural norms) without alternative formulations, is unacceptable (p. 20).

The movement towards establishing the *Rights of Peoples* partially reflects An'im's and Hammond's perspective. That is to say, The African Charter for Human and Peoples Rights/Banjul Charter strengthens African cultural values, and while it may conflict with some universal values, they argue that these conflicts should be mediated rather than overlooked or suppressed (p. 35). Chapter 1 sets both the philosophical and practical tone(s) on which the remaining seven chapters (mostly case-studies) build. Chapter 2 by Chanock is a critical discourse that unravels the concept 'culture' and uses the history of imperialism, international debt and world trade as the point of departure for any analysis of rights and cultural transformation in Africa. He contends that politicians in Africa and Asia, who are often resistant to change, have tried to push the rights issue from the realm of both state and society into that of 'culture' rather than the micro, daily lives of ordinary people (p. 63). The third chapter by Mutua on The Banjul Charter is a lucid exposé of human rights in Africa before colonisation. It also emphasises the role of the individual as bearer of both rights and duties, and as the basis for a rights regime capable of achieving legitimacy in Africa (p. 70). He contrasts this notion of legitimacy to that of 'narrow political elites who barely understand the Western notions they eagerly mimic – and who have lost the anchor in their past' (p. 92). Mutua insists that Africans must re-examine the assumptions underlying the role and purpose of the state and its organisation.

Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 8, by Butegwa, Musembi, Abdullah and Nzioki, all African women scholars, human rights activists and/or lawyers, provide refreshing case studies of women, culture and land rights in Africa. The overarching theme in these chapters is the feminist/womanist critique of universal documents and their privileging of a patriarchal view of family as the basic unit of society, and the subordination of women within the family itself. These contributors both interrogate and unravel universal human rights principles, and distill from them practical and concrete community and gender-based solutions to overcome land disparities in Africa (especially in Nigeria and Kenya). In the end, each chapter implicitly or explicitly argues that change will require simultaneous struggles over property, norms governing gender, and public decision-making authority (p. 258), as well as the dislodging of patriarchal values and relativist portrayal of local norms as immutable (p. 145).

Chapter 7 is by Shivji, a renowned Africanist and academic lawyer, who with great expertise explores the notions of justice, rights, democracy and fairness in reference to ongoing debate on land tenure reform in Tanzania. Shivji argues that all these concepts are interrelated, and that no major law can work satisfactorily if it does not speak to the main grievances of the large majority of land users (p. 193). In the case of Tanzania, the commission charged with land reform neither rejected wholly nor uncritically accepted the law, but instead sought to reform top-down institutional structures so as to create space for the forces, concepts and perspectives from the bottom-up (p. 212).

The connective tissue to the volume is the notion of 'bottom-up' as a strategy for reform and as location for analysis of cultural transformation. Ultimately, this is an important book, first because it suggests ways of resolving the controversy over relevance and application of 'universal' and 'relative' human rights norms, but secondly and more important, because it advocates bottom-up, feminist/womanist and alternative perspectives to land reform in Africa. This is important because it places these concerns at the centre of global power politics in support of land reform to benefit those at the margins and most in need of rights protection. For the most part, the volume avoids the legalism and philosophical inertia typical of human rights texts. This is refreshing as it should make the book a friendly read to specialists and lay persons alike.

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**Unsustainable South Africa: environment, development and social protest** by PATRICK BOND

London: Merlin Press, 2002. Pp. 449, £18.95 (pbk.).

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Launched to coincide with the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, this is the penultimate work by Patrick Bond in a collection of eight books on applied political economy in South Africa since 1999. Several titles in the collection (*Elite Transition*, *Against Global Apartheid*) already have the status of minor cult classics amongst many activists and researchers. This work, which aims to place South African environmental issues and struggles in a far more prominent position, is bound to join them.

Many of the book's key ideas have already seen the light of day in other publications, especially the journal *Capitalism Nature Socialism*. In particular, Bond's fusion of red, green and brown politics, and the hopes he invests in a reinvigorated grassroots politics within South African cities, will be familiar to many. To this, he adds detailed case studies of Mandela Metropole's Coega Port Development and Industrial Development Zone – a white elephant that has worrying echoes of the very worst development blunders; the Lesotho Highlands Water Project – from which years' more corruption scandals are hinted at emerging; and the backtracking and 'talking left whilst walking right' of the ANC and its alliance partners over municipal services debates. The documentation provided in each case is meticulous, and this book will serve as a tremendous resource for other researchers wishing to follow up the crucial issues it raises. The extensive footnotes provide yet more detail (perhaps too much?) and almost like a Shakespearean soliloquy, the asides tell us almost as much as the main text.

Much of this is depressing reading. With money being squandered on vain and nonsensical projects, the state of the environment at various scales (the body, household, metropolitan, national, regional and global) is shown to have worsened post-1994. In spite of the grand ambitions of the 1996 constitution, profit is shown to have been privileged at the expense of the majority and the conditions in which they live and work. The main protagonists in a policy drive to the right are shown to be the Bretton Woods organisations and the flood of neoliberal policy advice they proffer. Discourses of sustainability are shown to be further traps into which unwitting activists might be snared, as the Bank attempts to co-opt dissent. Against this, Bond provides cogent arguments for alternatives, largely based on the 'non-reformist reformism' of the 1994 ANC Reconstruction and Development Programme – a clever rebuke to those who would label him an 'ultra-leftist'. Those he now sees carrying the ideals of the RDP and the Freedom Charter are groups such as the Anti-Privatisation Forum and Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee whose calls, as Bond points out, often reflect a radical environmental consciousness.

However, apart from being a tremendous documentation of shifts in policy and a cogent argument for saner alternatives, the book provides little in the way of theoretical analysis. Lost amongst the intricacies of World Bank and ANC policy debates, there is little space for standing back and analysing broader societal processes. The state, if anything, is portrayed as merely a reflection of the balance of power in post-apartheid society – a reading which does not really hold up to much of the book's more nuanced analysis. Instead, it would be helpful to use the policy debates considered in order to really prise open the forces within South Africa. From here, it might be possible to make better sense of the state and its relation to the reproduction of such a distinctive system of accumulation. Refreshing perspectives might emerge from this, and from a greater degree of abstraction (before reconstructing the thought concrete) in the dialectical approach that elsewhere Bond champions. Perhaps this will emerge in the last of the series – a work he promises will 'consolidate the most durable arguments into a holistic analysis'. I wait expectantly.

ALEX LOFTUS  
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**Rethinking Pastoralism in Africa: gender, culture and the myth of the patriarchal pastoralist** edited by DOROTHY L. HODGSON

Oxford: James Currey, 2000. Pp. 272, £40.00; £14.95 (pbk.).

DOI: 10.1017/S0022278X04230555

This book is a welcome contribution to the field of the study of pastoral production systems in Africa. It is the first book in which gender relations are systematically analysed in different pastoral societies in West, East and Southern Africa. The communication between gender and pastoral studies results in a deconstruction of the patriarchal myth that rules studies on pastoral societies. Women play a crucial role in material expressions of the identity of pastoral groups, in power relations, local knowledge, social relations, and modernity. One really wonders how it has been possible that the male presence and dominance in pastoral society has so long been the dominant discourse in pastoral studies. The different authors, however, do not analyse the state of the art of pastoral studies, or search for the reasons for the lack of gender perspectives in the study of pastoralists. This was not the aim of the book but could have furthered the argument. The book is compelling reading for people studying pastoral societies, working in rural areas and in development agencies.

The articles are grouped into four different sections. The first shows how women's material culture is important in the definition of identity. Bianco discusses Pokot society and Kratz & Pido Maasai society. The third article in this section is of a different nature. It examines archaeological artefacts and tries to retrace gender relations in a pastoral society that no longer exists as an independent ethnic group, the Khoekhoen of Southern Africa (Smith & Webley). The second section is about domains of power. First, Hodgson deals with a historical analysis of the social relations among the Maasai in Tanganyika. The second chapter deals with women's roles in peacemaking in Somali society; a very relevant issue in today's political situation in Africa, which has recently come to the fore in Sudan and Sierra Leone (Elmi, Ibrahim & Jenner). The last chapter deals with knowledge and specialisation as a field of power. Women have their specific domains that give them important roles in food production in society (Sullivan). The third section is on social relations. The first chapter discusses matrifocal units and their roles in production and inheritance in Turkana society (Broch-Due). The second article deals with women as individuals and their roles as mothers in Tuareg society (Rasmussen). A general conclusion of the three articles is that women's roles in present day societies cannot be confined to the household domain, nor are they 'victims' of economic and social changes. On the contrary, women carve out their own domains and keep their central roles in society. Buhl & Homewood discuss this for milk selling among Fulani women in Burkina Faso, Straight for the discourse on development among Samburu women in Kenya, and Aguilar for pastoral women in an urban environment.

The cases in the book are from East, West and Southern Africa. East African cases are the most numerous, which also represents the state of the art in pastoral studies in Africa: pastoral groups are more numerous in East Africa than in West and Southern Africa. These societies share a focus on pastoralism, but the book does not systematically explore their differences, so that a comparison becomes blurred for the reader. Nevertheless the commonalities are large and therefore

I think the editor reasonably argues that the conclusions are relevant for all these societies. The articles are written from different scientific perspectives, and research is done with various methodologies. All these different approaches do withdraw the patriarchal myth, which makes the book's argument convincing. At the same time this 'multi' approach and the dispersion of the groups of pastoralists makes the book useful for teaching purposes.

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**To Dwell Secure: generation, Christianity, and colonialism in Ovamboland** by M. MCKITTRICK

Oxford: James Currey, 2002. Pp. 297, £16.95 (pbk.).

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In November 2004 a new president will be elected in Namibia. A local newspaper submitted questions to the three competitors nominated by the Central Committee of the former liberation movement SWAPO, one of whom will be elected as the party's official candidate at an extraordinary congress in May. This will actually be the real decision about the successor to the current President Sam Nujoma, who vacates office after three terms since Independence in March 2005.

Nahas Angula, minister of higher education, training and employment creation, was quick to respond to the newspaper. Asked, finally, if he would like to add anything, he concluded by strongly dismissing rumours that he might have converted to Islam. He clarified: 'Now, I do respect all religions – that's number one – but I remain committed to the confession I was baptised in. That is the Lutheran church.' He then as a sign of proof handed over the membership certificate and explained: 'My membership of the Lutheran church is something I cherish because this church was received by my grand-grand parent, that is King Shikongo shaKalulu. ... So, there is ... a historical attachment to me in relation to this particular church because it was received by my grand-grand parent in my area. The reason why I believe in education and enlightenment comes [from] very far. When Shikongo shaKalulu received these missionaries, it was because he believed in enlightenment himself. So, this comes from very far' (*The Namibian* 3 May 2004).

This recent example illustrates in an almost perfect way the importance of the study under review. A historical and socio-anthropological exploration based on intensive field work, it introduces aptly the substance of the matter in the very first sentence: 'This is the story of how a foreign religion – Christianity – came to dominate a corner of southern Africa so thoroughly within the course of a century that many indigenous religious practices died long before the last "pagans"' (p. 1). McKittrick traces the various stages of penetration by agents of the Christian gospel and their effects in the particularly sensitive local environment of the northern floodplains in current Namibia. This part of the territory and its social realities has a high relevance for the Namibian state, its political office bearers and their concept of nation building. Hence this particular history is also a significant aspect of the present realities. In the absence of any similarly thorough and in-depth studies, McKittrick's work is therefore an extremely valuable source

of information for a variety of interests to gain further insights into the mindset of people who have a social impact on current policies in Namibia.

By the mid-twentieth century, when the last battles over the hegemonic religious discourse – fought under the slogan *Epapudhuko* (Awakening) – came to an end, the northern parts of the Namibian territory (the most densely populated area of the vast country and the home to the national liberation movement SWAPO) were under firm and exclusive control of Lutherans: ‘Christianity had emerged as the dominant social identity’ (p. 15). When *Epapudhuko* was over, the community of Christians in this region was practically universal: ‘today it is nearly impossible to find someone in Ovamboland who has not been baptised’ (p. 263). Surprising only at first sight, elderly Ovambo hence suggested in the interviews ‘that it was Christianity, not colonialism, that marked the biggest change of the past century’ (p. 17). A far-reaching statement, which the author seems to modify by adding: ‘Without the presence of missionaries, colonialism would have looked quite different’ (*ibid.*). But *Uukristi* (Christianity), interestingly enough, was in interaction with the missionary church, especially the vehicle for a younger generation to take centre stage in important aspects of social transformation. They used the opportunity to gain influence and control over a *rite de passage* and hence access to power that they otherwise would have not been able to exert.

It might be a worthwhile challenge to utilise these insights for another study, which traces the extent of such generational impact on the early formation of the anti-colonial resistance during the 1950s in Northern Namibia and among the contract workers from this region. Age and gender as important (and so far largely underestimated) factors in interplay with Christianity within the formation of the liberation struggle leading to Namibia’s independence in 1990 might be a topical issue offering more than enough for a number of further investigative efforts.

At the time of writing it was unknown whether Nahas Angula (then considered as an outsider) made it as presidential candidate. But his strong stand in favour of his Christian origin and denomination certainly did not have a negative impact on the delegates to the SWAPO Congress, who had to make a choice between the contesting comrades. McKittrick’s study is a relevant source of information to offer reasons why this is so. It adds value to the body of knowledge accessible with regard to Namibia’s society and will remain, on the basis of the in-depth interviews, a useful resource and reference book.

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**Remote Corners: a Sierra Leone memoir** by HARRY MITCHELL

London and New York: The Radcliffe Press, 2002. Pp. 256. £24.50.

DOI: 10.1017/S0022278X04250558

*Remote Corners* is yet another excellent memoir produced by a ‘man on the ground’. And Harry Mitchell was not your standard British colonial officer-type. It was quite by chance, and in a last desperate bid to escape what he feared would become life in some dingy North of England office, that Mitchell, a ‘bookish and solitary’ (p. 246) young Cambridge graduate, of non-Public School, non-Establishment background, found himself in August 1954 in the interior of

Sierra Leone with responsibility for the ‘good order and governance’ of several thousands of people. He was 23.

For those students of African politics and history interested in what may best be termed the standard ‘mechanics of breakdown’ assessment, Mitchell provides chapter and verse. He had first-hand experience of newly elected local government authorities – and residual chieftaincy institutions – and of the nepotism, corruption, fraud and mal-administration to which both were all too often prone. He quickly discovered that many traditional rulers had long been accustomed to abusing their powers and prerogatives. ‘Illegal fines, levies, forced labour’ (p. 112) were common. But when confronted with their actions most were quite ready to mend their ways. Indeed, all chiefs protested to be great empire loyalists; and most expressed fears shared by British field officers of what seemed likely to follow on from independence. Recognising the stabilising value of such persons (and institutions) for the future of Sierra Leone, Mitchell did what little he could – often against the rip-tide pressure of democratically elected factions – to support these chiefs.

Like many who have surveyed past performance and current political wreckage in Africa, Mitchell offers his modest proposal for resolution. The UN, he declares, should become trustee for African states in difficulty, with powers to mandate former colonial powers willing to take responsibility for the countries concerned. But is this plan viable? Briefly, he concedes, it currently is not. But it does, he maintains, offer a possible blue-print for the future ‘salvation of Africa’ (p. 9).

While *Remote Corners* offers much of interest relevant to Sierra Leone and indeed to territories and authorities far beyond, one might perhaps only caution that this is a memoir, not a scholarly monograph. Hence, while the book reads easily, it does require a good deal of synthesis to draw together materials relevant to its central themes. As for the general production of the book, it is a relief to have print of a readable size. And while there is a good index, and the photos are relevant and of adequate quality, nevertheless a larger, more detailed map – perhaps one for each province – would have been useful. There is no ‘Further Reading List’.

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**Symbolic Confrontations: Muslims imagining the state in Africa** by

DONAL B. CRUISE O'BRIEN

London: Hurst & Co., 2003. Pp. 243, £40.00; £16.50 (pbk.).

DOI: 10.1017/S0022278X04260554

The broad question Professor Cruise O'Brien addresses in this, a collection of his published essays, is that of the relationship between the state and society in contemporary Africa. The author is an authority on the Muslim Brotherhoods of Senegal and, unsurprisingly, he approaches this issue very largely from the perspective of the role of West African Islam in modern politics. His main terrain of research offers an (almost unique) example of a successful political *modus vivendi* between a secular post-colonial state and a Muslim majority society, in which the Sufi orders continue to exercise unrivalled influence over the religious and temporal lives of their adherents. The state must heed the Mouride leaders, who



thus exercise enormous informal power. Without doubt, the pieces gathered in this volume provide as informed and compelling an account of the Senegalese experience in maintaining political ‘harmony’ as is currently available in English. Indeed, anyone interested in that West African country should take full advantage of the myriad insights contained in these fascinating and well-written chapters. The book, however, aims to tackle a larger topic – elegantly adumbrated in the title as ‘symbolic confrontations’ – and it is thus legitimate to ask how much it contributes to a more general and sharper understanding of the post-colonial state in Africa today.

The *Introduction* opens with an arresting, and basically accurate, statement: ‘The state in Africa enters the imagination along a religious path. This unfamiliar and formidable worldly power is approached, from below, in terms of great powers which had already been locally imagined, powers of the other world’ (p. 1). Here, the author hints at what has only recently become an accepted interpretation of African politics, namely that the secular and religious realms cannot be separated: they overlap and operate conjointly – as Ellis and Ter Haar have shown convincingly in their newly published *Worlds of Power: religious thought and political practice in Africa*. However, this very modern and most relevant argument about the nature of power in contemporary Africa fails to find expression in the chapters that follow. Although updated for facts, they remain creatures of the historical and conceptual context within which they were written. The story of symbolic confrontation that unfolds in the book is in the end nothing more dramatic than the mutual adjustments made by the state and the various Muslim *tariqas* of West Africa since colonial times. The example of Kenyan Muslim politics, the sole exogenous instance provided in the volume, acts merely as a foil to the West African case studies. The author remains wedded to a very ‘classical’ (and very European) vision of the ways in which state and (Muslim) societies joust with each other within a situation in which both can benefit if they play according to the rules of the game. The experience of Senegal demonstrates that such ‘symbolic’ confrontation can work, under very specific circumstances. But how representative is that example of the trajectory of post-colonial African politics, even in West Africa?

The discussion of Nigeria, the only other country considered in any detail by the author, reveals that tensions between Muslim politics and state power are not as easily managed as the case of Senegal might suggest. Furthermore, the reasons why the situation of Nigeria is as precarious as it is have less to do with religion than with the consequences of a clientelistic political system in which accountability has largely disappeared. It is, of course, true that the balance of power between society and state is more easily achieved in a religiously homogenous situation, such as Senegal, where over 90 per cent of the population is Muslim. However, the recent history of Somalia would suggest that religion is only one of many factors that influence politics in Africa. Although the last chapter in the book – ‘Does democracy require an opposition party?’ – ranges more widely and to good effect across the continent, the book as a whole will provide little enlightenment about the nature of power in Africa above and beyond a sagacious vision of the experience of Senegal. One must welcome the publication of Professor Cruise O’Brien’s incisive (and today largely unavailable) essays on the West African country he knows so well. Yet, one is tempted to say that, however



delightful it would be to think otherwise, Senegal is not Africa. *Symbolic Confrontations* promises more than it can deliver. Unfortunately for Africans, the political realities on the continent today are commonly far more lethal than mere symbolic confrontations. They are often a matter of life and death.

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**Political and Economic Liberalisation in Zambia 1991–2001** by LISA RAKNER

Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2003. Pp. 235, £16.95 (pbk).  
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The potential for the consolidation of democracy in Africa and its relationship with economic reform has been the subject of much debate over recent years. Rakner's book makes a significant contribution to this debate. She provides a detailed history and analysis of political and economic reform in Zambia, and makes use of the evidence gathered to evaluate several theoretical approaches, principally the 'dual reform perspective'. Therefore, whilst this is primarily a study of the political economy of Zambia and the effects of aid conditionality there, it also engages with wider debates on economic reform and democratisation in Africa.

Rakner argues that despite initial optimism following Zambia's transition to multiparty democracy in 1991, both economic and political reform processes have slowed significantly, so that now Zambia is characterised by (following van de Walle) 'partial reform syndrome'. One explanation for this stagnation of the reform process can be found in the dual reform perspective, which contrasts with the previously prevalent assumption that democratic and (painful, but necessary) economic reforms could not be implemented concurrently as the former would empower losers from the process to obstruct the latter. Rather, this perspective puts forward the argument that, after taking advantage of the honeymoon period afforded by the introduction of democracy to introduce difficult economic reforms, the government should cultivate a coalition of support based on 'winners' from those reforms, which could then sustain support for further economic and political liberalisation. A stalled reform process could therefore be a symptom of poor political management and a failure of government to effectively mobilise potentially supportive constituencies. Rakner deploys a two-level games model, analysing relations between government and domestic interest groups and between government and the donor community, in order to explain the political economy of reform in Zambia and examine the utility of the dual reform perspective.

Rakner demonstrates that economic reforms have impacted on the three main interest groups in Zambia (labour, business and agriculture) in ways that have contributed to a weakening and fragmentation of these groups. For instance privatisation and public sector retrenchment weakened the union movement, and small and large-scale farmers were split over the issue of liberalisation of agricultural markets. In contrast to the predictions of the dual reform perspective, no solid constituencies with interests in supporting the reform process have been created. There has also been a proliferation in political parties in Zambia, although most of these were created by former members of the ruling party, the

MMD, and some were possibly created as part of an MMD strategy to split the opposition. As Rakner notes, few offered a coherent economic programme distinct from that of the MMD government that could provide a choice for different interest groups, despite widespread opposition to donor-initiated economic reforms. This leads to the slightly counter-intuitive conclusion that interest group politics in Zambia has declined since the introduction of democracy – both the influence of and choice for interest groups has been constrained.

Rakner locates the causes of stalled reform in Zambia with the political elites, once again confounding the dual reform perspective's expectation that popular reactions to economic liberalisation would prove to be the main obstacle. Influenced by the neo-patrimonial approaches of authors such as Bayart and Chabal, she argues that political elites played international and domestic constituencies off against each other – for instance, the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) often provided a convenient scapegoat for unpopular policies which were also in the interests of elites. In addition, divisions between the IFIs and bilateral donors on the importance of political conditionalities, and the ultimate weakness of the donor community on issues such as the highly suspect conduct of the 2001 election, permitted a number of undemocratic practices and raised further concerns about the consolidation of democracy. Overall, Rakner argues that after the old guard in Zambian politics defeated the 'Young Turks' within the MMD, and the government had rushed through the less threatening economic reforms by about 1995, commitment to economic and political reform waned. She argues that many reforms were implemented only partially or delayed, and that those that were implemented were in (or at least could be adapted to) the interests of political elites. The example of the privatisation of Zambia Consolidated Copper Mines (ZCCM) is illustrative here, as privatisation was resisted for years, but eventually undertaken once many of the company's assets had been stripped.

This is a well researched book, drawing on over 120 interviews conducted by the author in Zambia. It is well argued and contains a wealth of information about the recent political and economic history of Zambia, as well as engaging with the wider theoretical literature on reform and conditionality. I did find the writing style a little dry and uninspired on occasions, and felt that Rakner slightly over-emphasised the degree to which the Zambian government has managed to evade economic conditionalities. Nevertheless, the argument presented here is basically sound and well supported, and I can recommend this book to anyone interested in Zambian political economy or wider debates concerning democratisation, conditionality and the state in Africa.

PETER LLOYD

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**Refugee Manipulation: war, politics and the abuse of human suffering** edited by S. J. STEDMAN and F. TANNER

Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2003. Pp. 202, US\$46.95; US\$18.95 (pbk.).

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Refugees have two images in the West: when located in far off lands, particularly, they are generally viewed as innocent victims, fleeing political persecution and

war; when they try to enter OECD countries, they are frequently depicted as economic refugees, crossing borders to exploit the economic opportunities and benefits offered in the high-income countries. Resource flows from rich countries to support refugees in developing countries are justified from both perspectives – explicitly, to relieve suffering of those fleeing persecution, and implicitly to keep the refugees away from their own borders. However, this book vividly portrays a third vision of refugees, ‘refugee warriors’ (as Aristide Zolberg has named them) who are following political strategies, which involve manipulating their refugee status, controlling and exploiting the mass of less political refugees that war inevitably produces, in order to further their political strategies. Resource flows to support ‘humanitarian’ imperatives, are then used by these warriors for political purposes.

The book contains three examples of how the refugee situation is manipulated for political purposes, not only by powerful refugees but also by foreign states, including Western governments – Cambodia, Afghan refugees in Pakistan, and the UNHCR camps that housed Rwandan refugees. In Cambodia aid resources were used to provide continued support for the Khmer Rouge by the West and China, in order to prevent Vietnam dominating Cambodia. The camps were used for rest, recuperation and training by the Khmer military leadership. In Pakistan, the Afghan refugees were supported by the US as a resource against the Russian-supported regime in Afghanistan. In Zaire, the Hutus responsible for the Rwandan genocide dominated the UNHCR camps and exploited the resources supplied by the international community to arm and to attack Rwanda, killing more Tutsi in a series of raids into Rwanda, while ruthlessly suppressing any refugees who protested. The international community knew what was happening, but took no action, and ultimately it was the Rwandan military which disbanded the camps.

This type of refugee situation presents vivid ethical dilemmas. It is accepted by everyone that the manipulation and political use of humanitarian resources that occurred in Rwanda and Cambodia is unacceptable. Pakistan is a less clear case, since all the refugees supported the political strategy. But as the concluding chapter makes clear, there is no agreement on what should be done. The UNHCR recommends putting the burden on host countries to ensure the security and humanitarian nature of camps; and where this fails relying on reports by monitors to turn to the Security Council for help. Yet host countries are often part of the problem: the idea that the Zairean government could have sorted out the Rwandan camps is not convincing, to say the least. And the Security Council powers showed no signs of being willing to do so. The authors, therefore, suggest non-engagement of the international community should be an option, where other approaches have failed. Stopping the resource flows would sharply reduce the oxygen of the manipulators, while the possibility of this might also encourage host governments to act more forcefully.

Ultimately, however, we are discussing immensely political situations with strong international as well as local dimensions. Any solution, including non-engagement, will be rejected where it conflicts with powerful interests, as was certainly the case in Cambodia and Pakistan. The UNHCR itself is an important player with its own interests, whose role and status would for example be adversely affected by a non-engagement strategy.

This is a powerful and important book – it forcefully presents complex and important dilemmas, though it does not solve them. These, unfortunately, are recurring dilemmas, which we urgently need to understand – this book is a major help in doing so.

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**The Assassination of Herbert Chitepo: texts and politics in Zimbabwe** by L. WHITE

Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003. Pp. 139, US\$39.95; US\$15.95 (pbk.).

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Luise White's *Assassination of Herbert Chitepo* is concerned in the way people talked about the assassination and different groups related themselves to it. *The Assassination of Herbert Chitepo* clearly demonstrates the unhealthy process through which an attempt to attain majority rule through armed struggle suffered from controversial bloodbaths. By focusing on the competing texts and confessions on the assassination and their analysis of cause and method, *The Assassination of Herbert Chitepo* provides 'a way to look at the broader political contexts of African and white politics in the 1960s and 1970s' (p. 70).

Probably one of the most profound achievements of *The Assassination of Herbert Chitepo* is its contribution to historical methodology. This is more especially with regards to handling complicated subjects with a wide time-frame, as well as the skilful use of a multiplicity of sources: archival, secondary and primary. The book interrogates more than an event. It is a story of stories that seeks to unearth the environment within which the key event (its causes and the ripple effects of its unfolding as part of a war of independence and on the politics within which that war was set) manifested itself. As a work that focused on several complicated and competing texts of confessions and testimonies, Luise White manages to reduce the distance between 'cumbersomeness' and clarity. This book has been published at a time when Zimbabwe as a subject attracts lots of attention. However, this book is not just another book on Zimbabwe or on Chitepo's assassination, nor is it another book for the shelves of those fascinated with murder mysteries. It offers a major contribution in the field of theory and methodology in text investigation. Objectivity in reporting events emanating from a story with many players who have independent motives for participation, with varying aims, is very complicated. It is often easy to take one side, and interpret the events from the point of view of the position one has taken. White points out that victors in the Zimbabwean war set a frame within which they could tell a history that seeks to portray the struggle in their favour. The book successfully breaks that frame, suggesting that Zimbabweans 'need to look outside the frame they have set for themselves, and shift the history of war and violence beyond their interrogations of nationalism' (p. 36).

White demonstrates that more than simply telling a story of who by, why and how Chitepo was assassinated, the competing texts have the power to include and exclude others and certain institutions in the history of the struggle, the history of how majority rule was attained and steps towards nation building. Some of the

confessions make better sense when read within the context of current politics in Zimbabwe. For instance, it becomes easy to understand why the Smith regime and its white security officers would want to portray a history of the struggle that gives them a place in the new nation, while the ruling party's confessions seek to absolve itself of having murdered its own. Instead, it sees itself as the victim of external divisive forces.

The timing of the publication whose main focus is on the investigation of the 'texts and politics' come at a time when the ruling party through the monopolised airwaves, peddles 'myths about the armed struggle' that have the intended effect of what Luise White calls 'nation marshalling'. In so doing, the history that Zimbabweans are subjected to reports 'the overtones of the victors, the arrogant and the outstanding, in the way they deal or dealt with their victims' (p. 64). The Zimbabwean government controls communication and publicity so closely to ensure control over what stories Zimbabweans can hear, and ensures that only those stories legitimating its current land programme are propagated.

The last chapter of *The Chitepo Assassination* (pp. 93–107), answers an important question: 'Why is Chitepo's assassination important now?' The political drama of the twenty-first century in Zimbabwe is intensely heated. This is a time when rumoured ghosts of the victims of 1970s assassinations are claimed to play havoc in Harare and high places, and the war story is retold to rekindle patriotism and wrestle support away from the threat of a new opposition. In sum *The Assassination of Herbert Chitepo* provides a methodology for approaching the competing creations and interpretations of the current issues, their nature and dynamics, and perhaps charts a way out of the current socio-economic quagmire that threatens to reverse the gains of the 1970s war.

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### **Popular Political Culture, Civil Society, and State Crisis in Liberia**

by J. C. YODER

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This is an important contribution to understanding the crisis that has overwhelmed Liberia since the overthrow of the Tolbert regime in 1980. By focusing not on the civil war (1989–2003) but on the more general development of Liberian political culture, Yoder complements more narrowly war-focused accounts by, for instance, Ellis and Reno. The book usefully challenges some of the misunderstandings reflected in and sustained by this war-focused literature. Liberian political culture, Yoder convincingly demonstrates, is a product of long-term engagement by Americo-Liberians (descendants of former New World slaves), liberated Africans (captives released and resettled on the Upper West African coast), and two indigenous blocks (represented by Mande and Mel language speakers from the north-west, and speakers of the Krahn/Kru language group from the south-east). The current Liberian crisis is not to be explained in terms of unresolved cultural contradictions between indigenous and settler society or 'war lord' greed. Local political culture is a product of the articulation of all elements within Liberian society over 150 years. Yoder's central point is that life on a

remote trading frontier, heavily impacted by the slave trade, laid the foundations for what he terms (following E. T. Hall) a 'high context' society, in which authority, security and stability were more highly valued than initiative and individual rights. Liberians today continue to privilege strong leadership over the accountability and experimentation that fosters open, adaptive, social change.

Some would argue that patrimonialism is a power play – strong leaders brook no opposition. Yoder rejects this, suggesting that even the poorest Liberians are complicit in maintaining the patrimonial system, because they survive on crumbs from the rich rather than individual exertion. When the system broke down, it did so disastrously. Alienated young people found the shortest route to becoming 'big' – pointing the barrel of a gun (and when the gun alone was insufficient, resorting to terror tactics to tyrannise elders). The issue, as Yoder sees it, is to develop alternatives to patrimonialism as the basis for political engagement among Liberians. He decisively rejects Ellis' argument that the problem stems from a destabilisation of a spiritual order once regulated by the sodalities. Although Yoder makes no secret of his own religious affiliations, he clearly believes (with Durkheim) that spiritual order is a reflection of a society that works, and not the other way round. Pleas for the restitution of a rural society dominated by Poro and Sande would simply re-activate oppressive authoritarianism. (His argument is here based on the assumption that initiation into the sodalities induces discipline – some would argue coordination, which is perhaps a different matter.)

Yoder ends by drawing some policy implications. The new, post-war, Liberia needs to focus less on security issues and more on cultivation of tolerance, openness and accountability. It could be concluded, however, that he offers little more than what Mary Douglas terms 'bongo-bongo-ism'. A failing society (Liberia) should become a little more like a successful society (by implication, the USA). The mechanism for any such transition seems quite implausible (e.g. Yoder suggests working with the 'grain' of local culture, so that, for instance, NGOs might be allowed to 'buy off' patrons, but only if these items are shown in the accounts!). There is, in fact, no proper concluding chapter, and Yoder's uncertainty about what to recommend is apparent in the fact that the last page largely comprises the longest footnote in the book. In short, further work is needed for a more useful set of conclusions to emerge (though it should be pointed out the book was in press before the authoritarian Charles Taylor quit the presidency).

The situation in Liberia is now more open than before, and I venture three suggestions through which Yoder's analysis might be extended. First, it ought to take on board more of the 'politics of ambiguity', as described by Mariane Ferme for neighbouring Sierra Leone (too much of what Yoder's informants tell him is taken at face value). Indeed, his book, like Ellis', would have been richer if it had followed the path pioneered by Christopher Clapham, in developing a systematic comparison of Liberia and Sierra Leone – instead, the literature on the related crisis in Sierra Leone is largely ignored. Second, his 'high context' society is too restrictive a one-dimensional analytical concept. In the language of Mary Douglas 'grid' (i.e. 'high context') needs to be assessed in relation to 'group' (factors supporting voluntary association). A two-dimensional account would open up to inspection important areas of potential negotiation and settlement between regulatory and affective frameworks (whether initiation into a sodality

induces discipline or coordination, is a case in point). People will only give up attachment to hierarchy and deference when they are sure that group loyalties can be satisfactorily maintained by other, independent means (i.e. shifts along the 'grid' axis require room for manoeuvre on the 'group' axis). This implies very active institutional experimentation (my third suggestion), involving (ritualised) practices that invoke and reinforce awareness of civil and human rights (on the greater importance of rights than electoral process in paving the path to reform in the region, Yoder and I agree). One such domain of experimentation would be rights-based reconstruction practice, as currently attempted by some agencies in Sierra Leone. This has to be planned by Liberians themselves, building on a clear analysis of why their existing system has fallen apart. Even if Yoder's conclusions are too sketchy, his book is as timely as it is thought provoking, especially in relation to the new opportunities apparent in the post-Taylor period. Parties currently planning reconstruction should pay it the closest heed.

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