

in Mozambique during the early years of what became known as the civil war), RENAMO did manage to transform itself from marauding destructive armed bandits into a real civilian power, as Cahen's title change suggests. It is a power, he warns, that must be taken into account: FRELIMO beware! By the time he published this Portuguese version, a second national election had taken place (1999), confirming his prediction that RENAMO would gain ground.

Os Outros is neither a casual historical narrative nor a finished product, but a good collection of raw material from a well-informed eyewitness to a significant historical event. One hopes it will serve both Cahen and other Mozambique-philés in their future work.

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Roel van der Veen. *What Went Wrong with Africa? A Contemporary History.*

Amsterdam: KIT Publishers/Stylus Publishing, 2004. 377 pp. References. Bibliography. Country index. \$39.95. Paper.

A historian by training, Roel van der Veen became a development specialist in the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and moved from the Asia to the Africa desk in 1995. Frustrated by the fact that he could not find "a rapid introduction to Africa's recent history and problems," he decided to write "a general review of contemporary African history for all those with an interest in the continent" (5). Evidently, the author is not familiar with Basil Davidson's *Modern Africa: A Social and Political History* (Longman, 2nd ed., 1989), or Elikia M'Bokolo's *L'Afrique au XXème siècle* (Éditions du Seuil, 1985), both excellent brief introductions to Africa's contemporary history up to the 1980s.

Using modernization as a theoretical framework, van der Veen wonders why sub-Saharan Africa is the only region of the world that has been left out of the worldwide rise in prosperity over the past fifty years. Adopting a multidisciplinary perspective combining history, political science, economics, sociology, and cultural studies, he focuses on what he sees as Africa's main problem: state failure in general, and the failure of African leadership in particular. In broad strokes and through 370 dense pages of text organized thematically—the cold war, economic decline, democratization, renaissance, state disintegration, war, globalization, population, and poverty and aid—he paints a vivid and dismal picture of Africa and its people, mired in disease, poverty, hunger, debt, and conflict. In essence, the author attributes the failure of Africa's development to a failure to realize the continent's potential for modernization.

This work is commendable on several counts. First, it is arguably one of the most ambitious syntheses of contemporary African history and politics to date, combining the study of internal and external factors, usually treated

separately in the literature under the rubrics of African politics and African international relations. Furthermore, van der Veen adopts a unique multi-disciplinary perspective, as well as a long-term historical perspective, rightly arguing that “in order to understand Africa’s present-day situation, we must look not only at outside influences but also at long-term, indigenous African elements” (351). Following Basil Davidson (*The Black Man’s Burden*, Times Books, 1992), the author rightly argues that the African neocolonial state is an unreformed European construct that has been left intact by the African politico-bureaucratic elite which took over the reins of government after independence—hence the divorce between the African elites and their people. The Africanization of the colonial state thus “culminated in general dysfunctions, along with financial and moral bankruptcy” (355). Van der Veen is also correct when he observes that contemporary Africa is characterized by a poverty of ideology. Nevertheless, he concludes his book on an optimistic note, predicting that in the foreseeable future Africa will not become more unstable than it is at present, that African states will survive violent conflict, that Africans will obtain more say in running their countries, and that modern African states will eventually emerge.

This being said, this work suffers from a number of major deficiencies of both form and substance. First, the author generally fails to support his argument with adequate factual and statistical evidence, and whole sections of the book are devoid of references. Furthermore, a work of this magnitude requires, in addition to a country index, a thematic index as well as an index of the names of personalities and authors. Another major problem has to do with van der Veen’s arbitrary and unjustifiable exclusive focus on sub-Saharan Africa, dubiously characterized as “a natural unit” (19). Similarly, he excludes the Indian Ocean islands off the east African coast on the grounds that “most of them have mixed populations... of Asian, Arab, African, and European descent. Almost nowhere is the African element politically or culturally dominant” (20)—a startling observation for those familiar with the area’s population. The same rationale leads him to consider the Horn of Africa to be “more closely related to the peoples of the Middle East” (and even Europe) than to those of Africa (45), and to see South Africa—characterized as “a prosperous and industrialized white nation” (42)—as more “developed” than other African states due to the stronger and longer “white presence” (37). This type of reasoning leads the author to categorize African peoples arbitrarily as “black Africans” throughout the book, presumably as opposed to “white Africans,” a very dubious characterization that borders on racism.

Indeed, central to van der Veen’s *weltanschauung* are colonially scripted images of African backwardness, primitivism, and irrationality derived from Enlightenment and social Darwinist racist theories of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Most astounding is his observation that Arab slavery was far worse than trans-Atlantic slavery, a claim that flies in the face of all available historical evidence. He grossly underestimates

the total number of Africans transplanted to the Caribbean and the Americas during the period 1500 to 1900, referring to “more than ten million Africans... taken abroad as slaves” (54), when African historians such as J. E. Inikori and Joseph Ki-Zerbo have recently estimated this number to be much closer to a hundred million. Elsewhere the author asserts that Africa’s population slowly increased from forty million in 1500 to sixty million in 1800 and ninety million in 1900 (241–42). What he does not say is that this abnormally slow population growth pales in comparison to the population growth of Europe and Asia during the period 1650 to 1850, a fact that can be explained only by the excessive depopulation resulting from the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Indeed, the book is peppered with egregious factual errors, contradictions, and misleading statements too numerous to detail here.

Most problematic of all, however, is van der Veen’s adoption of modernization theory as his analytical framework. This leads him to posit Western culture, state, and society as the only possible development model to be emulated by Africans so that they may be propelled onto the path to self-sustained growth. According to this scenario, Africa should forget about industrializing and should concentrate on the production and export of the primary products (agricultural and minerals) which “Africa had possessed in abundance since time immemorial” and for which it has a distinct “comparative advantage” (209). The modernization paradigm also points to specifically African cultural obstacles to development: “Clientelism held private enterprise and personal development in a stranglehold, perpetuating the status quo in both societal and individual terms... This attitude formed a major barrier to economic growth and development” (220). Similarly, African politics presumably suffers from a lack of adequately educated people. Summarily dismissing dependency theory’s critique of modernization as ignoring the external factors, and comparing the Asian and African development experiences, the author places the blame for the failure of Africa’s development squarely on internal factors that have prevented this potential from being realized: “The main reason for Africa’s disappointing level of development is the Africanization of colonial organizational structures” (358). In brief, van der Veen’s unequivocal message is crystal clear: *hors l’occident, point de salut!*

At the end of the day, one is left with a distinct sense of disappointment and frustration. While *What Went Wrong with Africa?* contains much valuable information and provides a useful synthesis of contemporary African politics, economy, and society, knowledgeable Africanist scholars will find this book unenlightening and irritating and, at times, downright misleading. Consequently, it will be of greatest interest to a nonspecialist readership, but let this readership beware.

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