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### Review of David M. Gordon 'Nachituti's Gift: economy, society, and environment in Central Africa'

**Citation for published version:**

Fontein, J 2008, 'Review of David M. Gordon 'Nachituti's Gift: economy, society, and environment in Central Africa' Africa, vol 78, no. 4, pp. 617-620.

**Link:**

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

**Document Version:**

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

**Published In:**

Africa

**Publisher Rights Statement:**

© Cambridge University Press. Fontein, J. (2008). Review of David M. Gordon 'Nachituti's Gift: economy, society, and environment in Central Africa'. Africa, 78(4), 617-620doi: 10.3366/E0001972008000508

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**David M. Gordon, *Nachituti's Gift: economy, society, and environment in Central Africa*. Madison WI: University of Wisconsin Press (pb \ \$24.95 – 978 0 29921 364 0; hb \ \$60 – 978 0 29921 360 2). 2006, xii + 301 pp.**

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Africa / Volume 78 / Issue 04 / November 2008, pp 617 - 620

DOI: 10.3366/E000197200800051X, Published online: 03 March 2011

**Link to this article:** [http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract\\_S0001972000087866](http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0001972000087866)

**How to cite this article:**

Joost Fontein (2008). Review of David M. Gordon 'Nachituti's Gift: economy, society, and environment in Central Africa' Africa, 78, pp 617-620 doi:10.3366/E000197200800051X

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Mwenda appear to occupy class-based social positions, although they are not flagged as such in the book. He also writes that, 'More than one prominent family in Kitui in the late twentieth century could trace its fortune to the profits of successful elephant hunting in the late nineteenth century' (p. 54). This sounds like an aristocratic tradition, or we at least need further information about how it is not. This may seem to be an overly critical point, but the issue is more about method. If one is to take a particular theoretical approach to a history that discusses the blending of African and European traditions, the approach must be applied symmetrically to all parties.

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DAVID M. GORDON, *Nachituti's Gift: economy, society, and environment in Central Africa*. Madison WI: University of Wisconsin Press (pb \$24.95 – 978 0 29921 364 0; hb \$60 – 978 0 29921 360 2). 2006, xii+301 pp.

Fisheries have often been taken to represent the epitome of Hardin's thesis 'the tragedy of the commons'. For fishermen, and women, the need to protect fish stocks for future utilization is undermined by the difficulty of ensuring that one person's prudence is not in vain, where others simply exploit for immediate gain. Conventional responses to this dilemma suggest that only the imposition of private property rights can prevent 'the inexorable logic' (p. 6) of this 'tragedy' unfolding, but in open waters such rights are difficult to enforce, particularly on the geographical peripheries of weak colonial or post-colonial states. Some writers have challenged the assumptions of such arguments, defending the commons from a welfare perspective, and arguing that rarely, in fact, has 'open access' to communal resources actually existed; normally informal systems of management and access prevented environmental degradation. It is argued that it was the colonial imposition of inappropriate and authoritarian measures of control, and an accompanying capitalist 'privatization of nature', which exposed communal resources to environmentally degrading exploitation. But if the perspective of 'tragedy of the commons' theorists centred on essentialized assumptions of economic utilitarianism, then their opponents have sometimes stood accused of essentializing, and indeed romanticizing, ahistorical notions of indigenous natural resource management.

Entering into this affray with great panache, and thorough, sympathetic research, is Gordon's excellent historical and ethnographic study of fisheries in the Luapula Valley and Lake Mweru, on the boundary of Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Exploring the related themes of tenure, wealth and environment, Gordon's study illustrates, in his words, 'how particular industries based on natural commodities with distinct biological qualities affected patterns of ownership and wealth and held wide-ranging political and social implications' (p. 5) in the colonial and post-colonial contexts of this border region. Bringing anthropology's cultural and social sensitivity to the more material concerns of scholars of political economy, and vice versa, this study is situated amidst a growing resurgence of academic interest in the complex interplay of environment, economy, politics, culture and society, whilst simultaneously offering a profoundly empirical study of these inland fisheries in Zambia and the DRC. Overturning conventional notions

of economic development, which propose a simple progression from wealth in people to wealth in money or commodities, Gordon describes how, in Mweru-Luapula, fishermen, traders and entrepreneurs have continued 'to invest in a combination of human networks and capital resources appropriate to their social, economic and environmental worlds' (p. 202). He concludes that 'there is no reason to expect political economies based on investments in social relationships to disappear with economic development and the spread of commercial exchange-based economies, nor will forms of title become more clearly delineated' (p. 202). Therefore, he suggests, neither secure rights to resources, nor increased investments in monetary forms of wealth, are prerequisite for economic development, nor are they its necessary outcome (p. 202).

The book is split into two parts, each containing three chapters. The first three chapters focus on tenure and economics in the changing political contexts of the move from pre-colonial polities to the different colonial states of Northern Rhodesia and the Belgian Congo. Chapter 1 carries the title of the book: *Nachituti's gift* refers to particular oral traditions that relay a complex history of encounters, negotiations and reciprocal relations between conquering clans who became 'rulers of people' and autochthonous clans who were the recognized 'owners of the land and lagoons'. Picking up the opportunity offered by the *Nachituti* narrative 'to explore the relationship between narrative and social agency' (p. 29), Gordon discusses how this complex history of relations between the conquering Mwata Kazembe and *Nachituti's* people (autochthonous clans generically labelled 'Shila') are remembered and retold in the context of changing environmental, economic and political circumstances. The story being told will be familiar to everyone who has ever looked at the interplay of oral traditions, memory, landscape and politics across Southern Africa, but certain features of the empirical context make this chapter especially interesting, particularly the tensions between matrilineal and patrilineal ties and obligations, between sovereignty and autochthony, rule over people and ownership or custodianship of an environmental milieu, and between land and water-based resources, farms and fisheries.

In the following chapters, these empirical fascinations are deepened by the complexity of the 'borderlands' context. As pre-colonial regimes of rule and ownership were transformed, 'older stories of conquest would become entwined with colonial fables' (p. 61), and leaders of both autochthonous and conquering clans found themselves in new, but 'unevenly spread' (p. 84), relations of authority both with each other, and with the markedly different colonial regimes of the Belgian Congo and Northern Rhodesia. Thrown into the mix were the different economic agendas of the colonial states, which profoundly affected local forms of authority. In the Belgian Congo, fish were needed to feed Copperbelt workers, and expatriate Greek entrepreneurs played a central role in all sectors of the economy, including the production and trading of fish. The paternalism of Belgian policy ensured that colonial chiefs were sharply drawn into formalized state structures, but were unable to maintain their pre-colonial roles as owners or custodians of land and lagoons. Here fishery affairs were closely managed by colonial bureaucrats. On the Northern Rhodesian side, where Copperbelt industries relied less on fish than beef and colonial policy more on native authorities, colonial chiefs of the royal Kazembe clan found that their rule depended less 'on the reciprocal forms of governance of the pre-colonial period than on careful negotiation of interests between resentful and rebellious villagers on the one hand and modernising

colonial bureaucrats on the other' (p. 65). The chiefs' regulatory control over fisheries provoked challenges from people who mobilized around the displaced local autochthonous 'owners' of the land.

The third chapter describes how challenges to both the colonial chiefs and these local 'owners' of the land began to emerge from the new social networks and business ventures of entrepreneurs and their families who traded fish, francs and commodities to form new hierarchies of power and more fluid social identities, converting access to the fishery into new forms of wealth and status. Along with the growing influence of evangelical churches, an emerging civil society based on Luapula's 'marketable but not bankable economy' (p. 112) challenged matrilineal allegiances, and conversely, as big men accumulated wealth, 'witchfinders were called on to make entrepreneurial upstarts remember obligations toward kin, clan and ruler' (p. 112).

The second part of the book is structured differently. Here each of the chapters focuses on the political economy and tenure arrangements that grew up around the exploitation of the three main commercial species of fish (the *mpumbu*, *pale* and *chisense*) in the late-colonial and post-colonial periods. Beginning with the very real tragedy of the destruction of *mpumbu* fish stocks, caused by overfishing at its spawning runs by large-scale mechanized fishing from the Belgian Congo side, and particularly by the use of larger nets made possible by an organized cull of crocodiles, the story traces how in subsequent years the commercial exploitation of smaller species became increasingly important. As first *pale* and then *chisense* fishing became more profitable, relations between fishers, traders and state officials fired up with ideas about conservation were transformed, in tandem with the wider political and economic changes that these countries have witnessed over the post-colonial period. With the dramatic decline of copper prices, and successive economic crises, trader-fisher patronage networks and local fishing associations emerged to deal with predatory state agents, and to take over 'the functions of the fishery management from collapsing states and ill-equipped fisheries departments' (p. 169).

The most interesting transformation of social relations was provoked by the emergence of the *chisense* fisheries in the late 1970s (Chapter 6). Whilst the prolific abundance of *chisense* in the lake (a result of their remarkably short reproductive cycle and, possibly, fertilizer leaching from surrounding hills) protected this species from the devastating effects the *mpumbu* suffered, the lack of capital needed to catch and trade *chisense* commercially meant that this venture was available for successful exploitation by women. This allowed them greater autonomy, and enabled some to transform relations within their own households, loosening bonds of patriarchy. Women invested in forms of wealth that better suited their needs, helping their children, siblings and parents and sometimes redefining matrilineal affiliations that had long been sidelined by men whose control of fishery wealth had allowed them to consolidate bilateral ties over their families during the colonial period. As before, recriminations against women's new-found opportunities would take the form of witchcraft accusations, reaffirming the significance of witchcraft as the 'moral economy of the fishery' through which 'families discussed ... the problems of wealth, poverty and social obligation' (p. 195).

In recent years, *chisense* fishing has become more difficult and profits have declined as more traders 'chase Mweru-Luapula's most resilient resource' (p. 197). But Gordon resists the temptation to invoke the 'inexorable logic of the tragedy of the commons' (p. 197). To do this would be 'to opt for a narrowly defined trajectory of economic growth' which ignores how it was

precisely the lack of economic consolidation and the absence of established access rights to the *chisense* fishery that made it such a valuable opportunity for those not able to participate in other economic activities. For these people living in the 'hinterland of central Africa's collapsing copper mines' and the promised but undelivered benefits of structural adjustment, *chisense* trading is as important as ever.

David Gordon has produced a lively and intelligent book, which offers a solid contribution to ongoing debates about the interplay of the politics of environment, history and economy. I thoroughly recommend it for academics, students and development practitioners alike, and particularly for those concerned with understanding the complex nuances of the relationship between ecology, culture and economics in Southern Africa.

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DOI: 10.3366/E000197200800051X

GRACE BANTEBYA KYOMUHENDO and MARJORIE KENISTON MCINTOSH  
*Women, Work and Domestic Virtue in Uganda*. Athens OH: Ohio University Press (pb \$26.95 – 978 0 82141 734 8; hb \$55.00 – 978 0 82141 733 1). 2006, 308 pp.

As Hilda Tadria wrote in 1987: 'A man is highly regarded because he is essentially a cash earner (even if he is not earning cash) whereas a woman is underrated because she is regarded essentially as a dependent (even if she is earning cash).' ('Changes and continuities in the position of women in Uganda' in P. D. Wiebe and C. D. Dodge (eds), *Beyond Crisis: development issues in Uganda*. MISR, 1987.) The aptness of her assessment is well demonstrated in this scholarly contribution to the growing body of research on women and gender in Uganda, which spans the twentieth century. Ambitious yet carefully constructed, it focuses on women's work without neglecting the multiple dimensions of their lives, and illustrates how they face challenges to their own progress, which is interwoven with that of their country. Eight factors are selected as determining women's work, to show how institutions such as government, women's organizations and religious groups advance or restrict them. The comprehensiveness of the book is as new as many of its analyses.

The authors give great weight to 'culturally defined gender expectations' as they affect the division of labour. Part I introduces both the study itself and the peoples of Uganda. Part II covers the period 1900–71, and Part III deals with 1971–2003. Biographies of ten interviewees illustrate the authors' arguments.

It was in the early colonial period – the 1920s and 1930s – that British and African male leaders devised what the authors call the domestic virtue model (DVM), which defines women in terms of their marital and home responsibilities and keeps them from 'acting with inappropriate and dangerous freedom'. The first modification of DVM – this they call the service career variation – came about in the 1940s in response to the appearance of working women, teachers and nurses, who were encouraged in those professions by Christian missionaries.

In the initial decade of independence during Milton Obote's presidency (from 1962), both government and the press stressed women's contributions to economic and political life, but little change came about and scant attention was given to rural women. The three subsequent decades are identified as