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Social History & African Environments edited by
WILLIAM BEINART and **JOANN MCGREGOR**
Oxford: James Currey; Athens, OH: Ohio
University Press; Cape Town: David Philip, 2003.
Pp. 275, US\$49.95/US\$27.95 (pbk.).

HARRY WELS

The Journal of Modern African Studies / Volume 42 / Issue 03 / September 2004, pp 467 - 469

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Reviews

Human Rights Under African Constitutions edited by ABDULLAHI AHMED AN-NA'IM

Baltimore, MD: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003. Pp. 488. US\$65.00.

DOI: 10.1017/S0022278X04210369

The onset of European colonisation in Africa fundamentally altered the human rights situation on the continent. Without regard for human rights, colonisers subjected natives to a host of abuses. Native leaders were jailed without trial, and revolts or rebellions were met with the harshest sanction, punishment, or humiliation as deterrence. European brutality in dealing with dissent in Africa set a bad precedent for the observance of human rights on the continent. Colonial experience made human rights a non-issue after independence. Consequently, new African leaders were unwilling to share political power and, in contradiction with African tradition, found it convenient to ignore their people's basic rights and freedoms.

According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, states have the obligation to protect human rights under their own national constitutions, legal systems, and other official measures. Putting Africa to the test, *Human Rights Under African Constitutions* illustrates how some African states are trying to ensure the protection of persons subject to their jurisdiction. In a series of detailed and contextual studies of Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Morocco, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Sudan, and Uganda, contributors, using the same theoretical framework, seek to balance the socioeconomic and political diversity of these nations with the universal obligations imposed by international law.

In a brilliant introduction (chapter 1) the editor provides the theoretical framework 'by clarifying the parameters of the role of the people themselves in protecting their own human rights' (p. 1). In chapter 2, Ashenafi looks at the legal and constitutional history of Ethiopia through an examination of human rights laws, assessing their limitations and measures to improve them. In chapter 3, Busia lays out the foundations of the legal protection of human rights in Ghana, by exploring the broad context of Ghana's political history before focusing on the critical role of the judiciary and other important actors. In chapter 4, Kane explains how Guinea, a well-endowed country, failed to achieve political, economic and social development because of massive human rights violations, and why the country has yet to 'establish the mechanisms and procedures to guarantee its citizens effective protection of their rights and freedoms' (p. 141). In chapter 5, Nouaydi chronicles Morocco's struggle to incorporate human rights protections into its constitutional, legal, and political systems. He clearly demonstrates that internal legislation remains inadequate and that the law is applied in a selective and distorted manner.

In chapter 6, Mondlane contends that national independence is the very foundation for the protection of human rights in Mozambique. Having

explored human rights laws over the years, he argues that extreme poverty affects the enjoyment of any rights. In chapter 7, Obiagwu and Odinkalu highlight the current difficulties in enforcing human rights in Nigeria, by revisiting the political and constitutional history, and the social and economic context for protection of constitutional rights, and exploring the prospects for improvement. In chapter 8, Gahamanyi gives an overview of Rwanda's attempt to build a constitutional order in the aftermath of the 1994 genocide. Despite the passing of the Basic Act, effective protection of constitutional liberties remains elusive, mainly because of difficult cohabitation between Hutu and Tutsi groups.

In chapter 9, Seafield describes how the black people of South Africa continue to live in abject poverty, incapable of easily freeing themselves from the shackles of apartheid. While the new constitution enshrines a bill of rights, poverty, unemployment and illiteracy remain essential obstacles to the enjoyment of any rights. In chapter 10, Hussein depicts Sudan's constitution as hollow because it lacks a bill of rights. After a thorough overview of Sudan's political history, Hussein demonstrates effectively how 'the social and economic context within which legal institutions operate in the Sudan keeps the law from playing a meaningful role in improving the human rights situation' (p. 382). Chapter 11 explores Uganda's long and uncertain road to democracy and the rule of law. Sewanyana and Awori contend that 'notwithstanding a number of shortcomings, the constitutional and legal framework essentially provides for the vindication of human rights' (p. 385).

Democracy requires basic guarantees regarding food, health, education, housing, protection of the family, democracy, participation, the rule of law and protection against enslavement, torture, cruel and inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. This volume clearly argues that a well-informed and motivated citizenry is the most powerful force for creating the political will necessary to effect change at the national level. An African human rights court came into force in January 2004 following its ratification by the required number of African Union countries. In a continent where violations of human rights abound, the new court is seen as a step in the right direction. The court is meant to work together with the Banjul-based African Human Rights Commission and is intended to enhance the African Union's commitment to human rights in the continent.

In addition to a critical evaluation of the current state of human rights protection in each case studied, the contributors to the book outline existing national resources available for protecting human rights and provide recommendations for more effective and practical use of these resources. Combining theoretical rigor with solid empirical research, *Human Rights Under African Constitutions* constitutes an important contribution to scholarly understanding of human rights in Africa, and scholars, students, policymakers as well as NGOs will find it useful and enlightening.

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Social History & African Environments edited by WILLIAM BEINART and JOANN MCGREGOR

Oxford: James Currey; Athens, OH: Ohio University Press; Cape Town: David Philip, 2003. Pp. 275, US\$49.95/US\$27.95 (pbk.).

DOI: 10.1017/S0022278X04220365

This is, in part, a brilliant book. In its various chapters it offers many exciting analyses in the emerging field of environmental history in Africa (compare with Dovers, Edgecombe & Guest 2002). Its critical evaluation of many taken-for-granted (colonial) assumptions about Africans and their relation to natural environments, often in a 'declinist' discourse (p. 1), is well grounded in empirical data. Most of the chapters are well written, some are a straightforward delight to read. Social scientific writing as it should be, intellectually challenging, accessible and empirically solid. In that sense the book seems to expose as much as it describes. A 'must-read' for everyone interested in how African environments past and present are constructed and (re)produced by various stakeholders in the process, through being intimately intertwined with social history.

The 'explosion of interest in African history' (p. 1) which the editors observe fits well into sociopolitical and socioeconomic developments since the end of the Cold War. In geopolitics, a degrading environment in especially the developing world, for instance in Africa, is increasingly seen as a major threat to national security in the West, particularly in the United States. Kaplan (1994) was the author who probably more than anyone else popularised and articulated this particular environmental security discourse. In Kaplan's wake, an 'explosion of interest' (and research money) for environmental history, informing debates, policy and geopolitical decision-making in this field, could almost be expected. In the context of the above observation about this book currently under review, it is interesting to read and compare Helen Tilley's chapter on the question of how far the African Research Survey of the 1930s can be considered to be sciences used as 'tools of empire'. Her chapter argues that the Survey 'had progressive and liberalising effects, relieving rather than concentrating inappropriate colonial interventions' (p. 130), i.e. instead of the intended contribution to 'more effective colonial control' (p. 109).

'All texts require interpretation' (p. 165), as John McCracken states in his chapter on conservation and resistance in colonial Malawi. It goes almost without saying that this holds for scientific texts as much as other sources. Critical post-colonial theorists like Derrida, Said and Spivak could also have written such a sentence. Writing about social history in relation to African environments is about giving voice to people and social interaction through paying attention to particular (historical) sources. In this book the different contributors try to let the various groups of people, for instance 'the women' and 'river people' in Zimbabwe (Terence Ranger and JoAnn McGregor), or 'the people' of Kigezi in Uganda (Grace Carswell), 'speak for themselves' through the various sources, be it archival sources, policy documents, other texts, photographs or whatever. Through this publication, these people are brought onto the scientific stage. After reading the book we 'know' about 'the' Scottish missionaries in northern Malawi and about 'the' people who started to resist colonial agricultural policies. Paradoxically, as Spivak (1988) argues, representing the Other in Western social

sciences at the same time implies silencing him or her as an individual. Representation suggests a homogeneity that is never found in real life. Therefore, there is a clear danger, present in every corner of historical enquiry, that these 'master words' will be considered 'catachreses', i.e. 'improper words' (see Morton 2003), because of their claims of general and homogeneous representation. Is Sandra Swart's analysis of Afrikaner identity politics about all Afrikaners? Probably not. Does Robert Gordon's analysis of colonial photographs represent all colonial photographers and all colonialists' assumptions? Probably not. Are all settlers, colonial officials, scientists and Africans represented in the various chapters? Probably not. No doubt there were sub-groups and especially individual men and women at that particular time, age and context who did not fit into the general representations offered in this book. The ultimate consequence of the use of these catachreses is a reductionism and simplification of social complexity. It could make us aware once again of the limitations of Western knowledge systems, making the Others into 'mute objects of western representation' (Morton describing Derrida's critique of Lévi Strauss' 'A writing lesson', 2003: 32). Or, as Bhabha (1994: 31) formulates his critique on Western theoretical interpretation and representation, 'the Other text is forever the exegetical horizon of difference, never the active agent of articulation'. Western scholars are the ones in charge and in control of scientific knowledge production.

The editors are explicit and adamant in their claim that 'this is not a book about policy' (p. 2). Indeed, they have not produced a book focusing on environmental policy *per se*. But it leaves the critical observation in the second section of this review (on how and why this book fits into the current context of the explosion of interest in environmental history) untouched as, following Gillian Hart (2002), I would argue that 'histories of place ... are always multiple, contested, deeply politicised, produced in specific contexts, and *made to serve the needs of the present*'. This is also the main reason why it is so interesting to compare this scientific endeavour with Tilley's analysis of the African Research Survey in terms of serving other interests than may originally have been intended. Together with the post-colonial angle from which I look at the book in the third section of the review, I think it would have been appropriate to have added a concluding and final chapter, in which the editors or someone else could have taken somewhat more of a meta-perspective, and reflected on the production of Western knowledge about African environments that the book provides so lavishly in relation to policy issues and the pitfalls of representation. The fact that there is only one black African author included in the volume, Innocence Pikirayi, adds to my urge for more contemplation on this book 'in the greater scheme of things' of Western knowledge production. In the Introduction, Beinart and McGregor write that 'most contributing authors recognise that the sources with which they work are both evidence and representation [and being aware of that] ... handle their material with caution' (p. 6). If they had been explicit about the implications of that caution, many of the themes put forward in this review would probably have been redundant. Since this is not the case, one could argue that, to a large extent, this book produces, and in some cases reproduces, exactly what it tries to discuss critically and to de-mythologise: colonial and other taken-for-granted representations of and assumptions about 'Africans' in their relation to natural

environments. In the process, the authors may have silenced many different people to whom they intended to give a voice.

HARRY WELS

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Unfinished Business: South Africa, apartheid and truth by TERRY BELL
with DUMISA BUHLE NTSEBEZA

London and New York: Verso, 2003. Pp. 385, £19.00.

DOI: 10.1017/S0022278X04230361

Remember apartheid? Television pictures of policemen, uniformed and armed like paramilitaries, firing on crowds? P. W. Botha scowling into the camera?

Images of apartheid touched a chord with people all over the world, but it tended to mean something different for each country, and was reported with subtle differences of nuance in various national media. For many Britons, it was a story of settlers failing to decolonise. For Americans, it was all about racism. For a brief period, white South Africans took over from Russians as the stock baddies in Hollywood films. For the rest of Africa, it was about national liberation.

This was a morality story for all humankind – and it had a happy ending! After all the predictions of bloodbaths and mayhem, South Africans voted for the transfer of power and the end of constitutional apartheid in May 1994. ‘Who wants to bugger up a fairy tale?’ the BBC’s then correspondent, Fergal Keane, is quoted in this book as saying, in response to expressions of frustration that the full truth was not emerging in the media at the time.

Terry Bell, indignant at what he calls the ‘unfinished business’ of apartheid – the major aspects of the system left unexamined by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), the security chiefs left in positions of power, the businesses making profits under old and new dispensations – aims to re-examine the past. He writes explicitly of his fear that if this legacy is not faced up to, it will return to haunt the people of South Africa. Bell, a veteran journalist who for many years worked in England, including as one of the editorial team of the excellent *Africa Analysis* newsletter, provides us with what he calls ‘a series of interrelated images of the past’, ‘constructed from shards and fragments of fact’. Dumisa Buhle Ntsebeza, formerly an anti-apartheid lawyer, and later one of the most prominent members of the TRC, makes a substantial contribution, chiefly in the story of his own life and radicalisation, his persecution by the old Transkei bantustan government, and his experience of the TRC, as told to Terry Bell.

Bell claims in his Introduction that the first edition of the book, published in South Africa in 2001, triggered the first of a series of class action legal claims against banks and companies that profited from apartheid. The dust jacket blurb and accompanying press release contain hyped-up claims for the book’s brilliance, an impression which seems to have gained enough currency to earn the major UK and US edition here reviewed.

Unfinished Business is written with skill and passion. Terry Bell has done substantial research to tie up loose ends to some well-known stories, such as additions to the history of the Bureau of State Security (BOSS) and of the police spy Craig Williamson. The contributions by Dumisa Ntsebeza provide original material on one man’s struggle against apartheid and on the inner workings of the TRC,

on which there is now a very considerable literature. *Unfinished Business* remains, however, indeed a collection of bits and pieces of history rather than an attempt at a seamless account. Terry Bell's researches and Dumisa Ntsebeza's confidences have turned up no major new insights on the history of apartheid and the resistance to it. Hence, although the author repeatedly and correctly draws the reader's attention to the importance of the Afrikaner Broederbond in the system of racial oppression, and to the fact that this all-male, racially and religiously exclusive secret society was never investigated by the TRC, he tells us little about the Broederbond that was not already contained in two earlier exposes, by the journalists Hennie Serfontein, and Ivor Wilkins and Hans Strydom.

Arguably the most important gap in our historical knowledge of how the apartheid system worked relates to finance. How extensive were the parallel financial systems of the National Party and the Broederbond, pioneered in the 1950s by Nico Diederichs, probably the most thorough-going Nazi among all the National Party leaders? How did the Special Defence Account work, the massive slush-fund that was already a major source of illicit funding in the 1970s? What was the role of the Broederbond in the rise of the ABSA bank and in the financial machinations of the South African Reserve Bank? What did big business and foreign governments know about this, and how much did they help?

It is striking that, since 1994, South Africa has largely dropped from the attention of the international media. Book publishers too regard the apartheid era as old hat. 'There are only two stories left in South Africa', was the cynical view expressed by a veteran US journalist some years ago: 'Mandela Dies; South Africa Goes Down the Tubes.'

It is indeed important, as this book suggests, that South Africans themselves develop a clearer view of their own past, taking all the main factors into account. But this book is not it. The best we can hope for is that it reawakens an interest in South Africa's apartheid history that will in time address all the issues that have been left untouched until now.

STEPHEN ELLIS

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Conservation, Ecology, and Management of African Fresh Waters

edited by THOMAS L. CRISMAN, LAUREN J. CHAPMAN, COLIN A. CHAPMAN and LES S. KAUFMAN

Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2003. Pp. 514, US\$34.95 (pbk.).

DOI: 10.1017/S0022278X04240368

This book provides an impressively thorough and wide-ranging series of analyses of the state of Africa's fresh waters. It is structured into four parts. The first provides some long-historical perspectives, considering changes in African waters and landscapes over the millennia, and the question of what can be learnt from these long-term environmental transformations. The second part offers an extremely useful set of overviews of water resource and management issues in various African regions (southern, west and east Africa, the Horn, and Madagascar; there is no discussion of north Africa, however). The following nine chapters each focus on particular ecosystems or resource management issues,

amongst them the impacts of deforestation on aquatic ecosystems, the fate of Africa's fishes, and the environmental impacts of the Aswan High Dam. The final section considers some of the human dimensions of aquatic conservation and management in Africa. A useful concluding chapter summarises the volume's main findings.

The book as a whole is consistently well researched and informative. My only gripe is that – from the perspective of a social scientist interested in water issues – the human dimensions of Africa's water problems are seriously underplayed. The book is written almost entirely by biological and environmental scientists (though with a couple of contributions from anthropologists too), the predictable consequence being that, while the book purports to discuss the 'physical, biological, and sociological dimensions' of African water issues, the latter is seriously under-explored. Thus one finds very little informed discussion of the impacts of Africa's political economy on its waters, and nothing but a passing mention of gender issues. There is no discussion of debt, democratisation, privatisation, structural adjustment or globalisation, and of the impacts that these and other enormous sociopolitical challenges are having on water resources and access to them. Likewise, there is no discussion of domestic resource inequalities. Indeed there is a serious blindness to such disparities: we are told in the introduction, for instance, that 'Ethiopia has limited water resources', a claim that rather overlooks the facts that Ethiopia is the source of 85% of Nile flow, and that the country's water problems are not primarily ones of ecology but of political economy. In typically ecological fashion, population growth does receive a fair amount of attention throughout the book – but this merely underscores the point that this book operates with a largely a-sociological conception of 'human impacts'.

But these are minor gripes. The book provides an excellent survey of sub-Saharan Africa's aquatic ecosystems, and it should be of interest to anyone concerned with water ecology and management in the continent.

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The Politics of Evil: magic, state power, and the political imagination in South Africa by CLIFTON CRAIS

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. Pp. 297, £45.00.

DOI: 10.1017/S0022278X04250364

In this book, Clifton Crais offers a well-researched history and detailed analysis of the ways in which people, in colonial and post-colonial South Africa, identified, made sense of, and confronted the evil of the state and everyday life. Evil, he points out at the outset, is not 'simply a synonym for injustice' but is 'the intentional or instrumental use of occult forces ... to cause harm and bring disorder' (p. 4). The book addresses a range of themes concerning the contact zone of coloniser and colonised in the Eastern Cape, the rise and triumph of authoritarianism, the elaborate social engineering of the apartheid state, and the efforts of ordinary people throughout the years to shape, critique and resist the state. At the core of the book's analysis is what Crais describes as 'the theodicy problem within subaltern thought' (p. 148). He focuses considerable attention on subaltern

conceptions of magic and the supernatural, and on people's imagining of the formation of a black nation that would confront evil (and all that has gone wrong) and bring health to the world.

There are a number of well-known historical events narrated in the book but presented more vibrantly and accompanied by rich archival material. The first is the story of the ritual killing of Hamilton Hope, the British magistrate entrusted with the task of doing the Empire's work, by the Mpondomise paramount chief Mhlonto. Hope's death and the use of his body parts for medicine raises the crucial issue of beliefs regarding occult power which played themselves out in struggles between coloniser and colonised. The story of Hope's death in the first part of the book serves as a backdrop to discussion of how colonial administrators set out to gather ethnographic detail of customs and traditions of the people they sought to conquer. The initial chapters of the book offer an interesting overview of how the state from one era to the next flexed its increasingly bureaucratic muscle, placed various demands on people, and became progressively instrumental and separate from ethical concerns in its actions. Perhaps the key issue to discern here, apart from acknowledging the incoherence and brutality of state actions, is how the colonised 'folded the authoritarian state into their own, changing, political discourses elaborating a politics of evil in the face of outrage – and creating space within which to critique the state as illegitimate and evil' (p. 112).

In the second part of the book, Crais focuses on a range of social movements that emerged during the early days of colonial rule and apartheid. His discussion of the Israelites, the adherents of Nonhetha, Wellington Buthelezi and his Africanised Garveyism, presents powerful insights on subaltern politics, and particularly, the emergence of subaltern nationalism. The emphasis on the linkages between power, magic and evil offers a new interpretation of Eastern Cape political history. The author's discussion of subaltern movements is arguably a lot livelier when he relates the emergence of Makhulu Span, the Congo and Poqo and their roles in the Eastern Cape. Makhulu Span came into being primarily to put an end to stock theft. The Congo sought out and destroyed state collaborators. Both groupings, at the same time, appropriated categories and much of the institutional language and practice of the state. As with all the movements discussed, magic becomes an instrument to probe power and understand evil and rehabilitate the world. Crais elaborates: 'here, then, was a subaltern politics that sought less the capture of the state than its rehabilitation, less the destruction of chiefship than its moral reconstruction, less the seizure of power than the ecstasy of healing and catharsis' (pp. 191–2). In a later chapter the mobilisation of Poqo (the military wing of the Pan Africanist Congress) and its battles with the police are detailed. Here again, the fighters are engaged in a war against an evil state and its agents. Since this modern state is viewed as being endowed with magical powers, the fighters confront the state equally with violence, ritual protection and magic.

On a positive note, the book offers an extraordinarily rich account of the Eastern Cape's past, of the moral discourse of magic and of resistance to evil. On a negative note, many of the core arguments repeat themselves far too often in the course of the book, at points the chapters address too many issues thus losing focus, the author relies too heavily on conjecture and speculation in building his

analysis, and the tone of the book is heavily pessimistic. In the final chapter Crais correctly points out the pandering of the post-apartheid South African government to traditional leadership, and raises valid criticisms of the way in which political space is being reordered. Not all social analysts will share his description of South Africa's present-day 'state of emergency'. There will, however, be agreement that a new political history will have to address issues of good and evil as historical problems.

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Lineages of State Fragility: rural civil society in Guinea-Bissau by

JOSHUA B. FORREST

Oxford: James Currey; Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2003. Pp. 312, US\$49.95.

DOI: 10.1017/S0022278X04260360

With this richly detailed case study on the trajectory of the state in Guinea-Bissau, Forrest joins the increasing number of scholars seeking to analyse the causes and significance of state weakness in Africa. Broadly conceptualised as the inability of successive governments to construct state hegemony, the book thus ponders one of the big questions in the field of African Studies, that is the disjuncture between state and society and the resulting political dislocation in much of post-colonial Africa. In doing so, Forrest embraces a historical perspective in order to trace the pre-colonial and colonial origins of present-day state fragility and modes of popular resistance against centralised state authority. Analysing the historical lineages of state weakness in rural Guinea-Bissau, Forrest argues that enduring domestic social and political patterns of behaviour harking back to the pre-colonial period can adequately explain the conflicting interaction between post-colonial state and society in the West African country. In his view, indigenous social formations such as influential chieftaincies, age groups, informal trade circuits, spirit and religious societies and multiethnic alliances were the driving forces behind a vibrant rural society that first hampered the erection of the colonial state by Portugal, and later provided decisive support to the anti-colonial military uprising by the Cabral-led African Party for the Independence of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde. These ancient social formations, the author convincingly explains, came to constitute alternative and resilient forms of authority contesting the exogenous state. More precisely, the author evokes what he calls a 'praetorian social memory' of Guinea-Bissau's population, that is long-standing experiences of military success during pre-colonial times that later helped to mobilise local communities against invading external forces.

Densely written and carefully researched, the narrative on the military struggle against Portuguese conquest and colonial rule makes up the bulk of the book and once more casts doubt on the power of the colonial state, a view perhaps best exemplified by Crawford Young's seminal *The African State in Comparative Perspective*. However, Forrest hastens to point out the unique shallowness of Portuguese-sponsored colonial rule in Guinea-Bissau. In the 1930s, for example, the colony employed only 259 government functionaries (p. 169). However, this strikingly thin colonial force seems to undermine Forrest's argument on the importance of

indigenous praetorian capacities. For if no more than 100–300 European troops were stationed in the colony at one time (p. 140), the colonial army – though backed by local auxiliaries – could be expected to face effective resistance. This point, in turn, seems to be difficult to reconcile with the author's argument that state weakness owes more to the strength of rural society than the fragility of the state. What is more, Forrest provides disappointingly little space to the post-colonial period, and therefore falls short of extending his otherwise compelling case on the enduring importance of long-established social practices to contemporary Guinea-Bissau. Also, it is regrettable that the author does not broaden the insights gained from his carefully crafted case study for comparative purposes. Except for the works by Herbst, Mamdani and Young, the scholarship on the African state produced over the past decade is left out. Though this is perhaps due to the fact that the book was written over a period of 15 years, incorporating the existing literature and comparing its insights with his own would have benefited Forrest's book. Despite these caveats, *Lineages of State Fragility* provides an intriguing and greatly recommendable case study that – if only implicitly – makes a valuable contribution to the arguments advanced in the recent literature on postcolonial studies.

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Somalia: economy without state by PETER D. LITTLE

Oxford: James Currey; Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press; Hargeisa: Btec Books, 2003. Pp. 206, £12.95 (pbk).
 DOI: 10.1017/S0022278X04270367

Peter Little has written an important book about commerce and authority in a contemporary stateless society. This commerce is significant, accounting for more than 60% of livestock exports from East Africa in the 1990s. The book focuses on the pastoralists of southern Somalia, among whom Little engages in broader considerations about the nature of economic regulation where states have disappeared. Based upon field research along the Somali–Kenyan border, this book shows how Somali pastoralists organise a vigorous cross-border trade in cattle. They even prove better able to adapt to the exigencies of drought and insecurity than their Kenyan counterparts. This is because the absence of a state gives them the flexibility to migrate and to regulate their other affairs. Their clan and kinship networks manage the challenges of statelessness, rendering parts of Somalia more peaceful than the other side of the Kenyan border.

This investigation of the Somali cattle trading economy shows how cattle production near settled areas gets integrated into rural economies and cross-border markets, dismantling old urban–rural ties at the core of 'modern' state-building strategies of economic development centred on cities. These changes reflect the poor fit of the pre-war patronage-based politics with Somalia's main social and economic sector. Although livestock accounted for 80% of exports in the 1980s, only 6% of state expenditure was devoted to this sector. Thus, writes Little, when formal state structures collapsed in the early 1990s, pastoralists who did not benefit from patronage or government services had little to lose.

The bulk of the book is devoted to a fascinating examination of how clan and kinship structures replace the absent state to regulate economic transactions and provide bases for building commercial networks. They exploit new technologies such as mobile telephones to organise trade and provide financial services, showing how stateless societies can connect with the global economy while managing their own affairs. To the extent that pastoralist and kinship-based polities elsewhere have proven difficult for states to govern, Somalia's situation is widely relevant. Little provides an important contribution to thinking about alternatives to state in societies where states never fit well in the first place. Stateless governance also shows how social categories like kinship combine and break apart as they respond to political and economic conditions. This raises the broader question of whether such structures could provide the basis for a more stable and efficient alternative to states in places like Somalia that would be able to manage their relations with the wider economic and political world.

Evidence in the book suggests, however, that there are significant limits to stateless development, at least so long as nearly all of the rest of the world is organised as states. Even though Kenya may be more corrupt and violent than parts of Somalia, Little notes that traders pay a 20% risk premium on the Somali side of the border. Moreover, those organising cross-border transactions base significant elements of their operations in neighbouring states. Most likely this is because non-Somali counterparts would be reluctant to submit to commercial rules that relied on someone else's kinship structures to ensure contracts and adjudicate disputes. In a diverse world, the uniformity and predictability of state-like structures are useful for regulating exchanges with outsiders, as the growing regional dominance of trade from the more state-like Somaliland in Somalia's north demonstrates. This evidence contracts the conclusion that 'the destruction of the state only marginally impacted' pastoralists. It shows, however, that the violent, patronage-based state under the dictator Siad Barre did a very poor job of serving the interests of pastoralists. In fairness to the author, he does not promote statelessness as a sustainable alternative development model. Instead, he does a wonderful job of addressing how Somalis have devised creative institutional, cultural and behavioural responses to managing their affairs while fending off local warlords and global threats, a work that should appeal to a wide readership beyond those concerned with Somalia or pastoralists.

WILLIAM RENO
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Working on the Margins: black workers, white farmers in post-colonial Zimbabwe by BLAIR RUTHERFORD

London: Zed Books, 2001. Pp. 268, £45.00; £15.95 (pbk).
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Blair Rutherford's book looks at the lives of one of rural Zimbabwe's under-classes eking out a living on privately owned large-scale farmland in Hurungwe district. The book comprises eight well-written chapters based on research work done well before '*jambanja*' (violent seizure of white owned commercial farmland).

It lucidly narrates the nature and origins of settler-colonial and post-colonial sub-cultures, and how these have created and sustained this underclass in a very 'private space economy'. A key theme emerging from the book is the marginalisation of these black farm workers initially under settler-colonial policies and (after 1980) under the post-colonial state. Being on private property limited their access to public policy interventions in both historical periods. Rutherford also shows in the Afterword how their lot worsened with the advent of *jambanja*. Apart from the lucky 2% (of the farm workers) who got a share of the former commercial farms, most have been close to destitution as they lost both jobs and the derided 'domestic government' (constituted by the farm) that had structured their lives for nearly two generations.

After an informative conceptual and introductory chapter in which methodological issues are discussed, Rutherford gives us a focused narrative of the socio-historical context of the farm workers before doing the same for the operators in chapter 3. Chapter 4 focuses on the dynamics of life on the margins, particularly the daily struggles with the 'domestic government', while in chapter 6 we get to know about the existence of other even more marginal groups fighting for their lot in this socioeconomic setting (especially single women and recent migrants). Effective use of well selected life histories coupled with lucidly narrated personal encounters with key actors on the farms bring the reader closer to the personal experiences, tragedies, frustrations and hopes of the farm workers and operators. For example, in chapter 3, Rutherford gives us a unique insight into the buffeted social space of white commercial farmers through well-placed social encounters, while in chapter 5 Mai Chido's case takes us into the lives of women on the farms and their struggles for better treatment in a male-dominated space economy. In both cases we get an insight into the gendered space economy of the farms across the racial divide. Mai Godi and Mai Prudence's stories also demonstrate important linkages between the commercial farms and communal lands. They not only show the nature and extent of resource flows (money, labour) between the two space economies but also illuminate the disparate livelihood strategies among rural dwellers. Women falling foul of the patriarchy in the communal lands and 'domestic government' on the commercial farms are shown seeking refuge on commercial farms and communal lands respectively.

In chapter 7 Rutherford discusses peasantisation of commercial farm workers. This illuminates how the commercial farms operated as time-bounded spaces where people lived as long as they could still provide labour, but once sapped of all their work potential (often with little to show for it), had to find (buy) refuge on communal lands in old age. More significantly however Rutherford provides some evidence of commodification of land in communal areas. The farm workers knew of this informal land market and used it to gain access to communal lands even if it meant using the 'patriarchy' to do so (for women).

Rutherford's book stands out as an important contribution to ethnographic research in post-colonial rural Zimbabwe. As with most books on Zimbabwe written at a time of rapid change, Rutherford gives an Afterword to inform the reader about the events since the study. While this is a brave attempt to describe a fast changing situation, it does not do justice to the important dynamics shaping the current developments, especially when read as part of the analytical and lucid eight chapters comprising the book. The Afterword is however important as it

tells the reader about beginning of the demise of 'white' commercial farms as described in the book. The book therefore assumes further significance as a social historical record of life on white-owned commercial farms just before their demise.

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