

BOOK REVIEWS

Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History. Frederick Cooper. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005. 327pp.

In this strongly analytical historiographical exploration of colonialism, Frederick Cooper challenges a range of accepted concepts, raising crucial questions concerning key issues of identity, globalization and modernity. Rather than taking a particular stance on many of these issues, he prefers to engage with them intellectually, opening them to questioning. In so doing, he draws out the complexities and distinctiveness of various forms of colonialism, taking on many of the beliefs which pass as 'postcolonial theory.'

Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History consists of three main sections. Addressing colonial studies and interdisciplinary scholarship, Cooper begins by giving a historical overview of the rise and fall of colonial studies, exploring the relationship between anthropology and colonial studies. He draws on and synthesizes the wealth of new scholarship in African, imperial and world history to argue for a more balanced and contextualized understanding of colonialism than that offered by the works of Partha Chatterjee, Homi Bhabha, Ranajit Guha, Franz Fanon, and Edward Said, as well as a number of historians who followed in their footsteps. Surveying recent scholarship on colonial studies, Cooper's study addresses the changing focus, not as a succession of turns, but instead as overlapping and often conflicting perspectives, all in relation to the shifting politics of decolonization.

Cooper suggests that the insights gained from several decades of critical theorizing about imperial formations, colonial difference and postcoloniality must be recognized, as he calls for greater conceptual clarity among all those interested in questions related to colonialism. The second part of the volume turns to three central and related concepts that, he argues, epitomize the current direction of scholarship in colonial studies and in other interdisciplinary areas of research. Rethinking the concepts of identity, globalisation and modernity, Cooper draws out the limitations of such concepts, problematizing a terminology which is so often taken for granted. His use of case studies serves to illustrate the need for these categories to be understood in the often-conflicting ways in which they are deployed.

So it is that part three of *Colonialism in Question* moves from the critique of generalizing claims in the scholarship of colonial studies to examine the possibilities of history. Using two case studies, Cooper demonstrates a method of going about the study of colonial history without falling into the traps he identified earlier in his argument. The first is a wide-ranging comparative essay on the historiography of empire, from ancient Rome to the contemporary United States. It challenges the notion that ostensibly modern empires are inherently different from ancient or non-Western empires. A second case study draws on Cooper's previous research on post-World War II tensions between French and British imperial ambitions.

<http://www.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v9/v9i4reviews.pdf>

Although a challenging book that deals with often-difficult concepts, *Colonialism in Question* is clearly written and accessible on many different levels. A comprehensive introduction gives an overview of the topics covered in the book, while extensive notes expand on certain points, giving suggestions for further reading where necessary.

Charlotte Baker
University of Nottingham

Reversing Sail: A History of the African Diaspora. Michael A. Gomez. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. 219 pp.

Marcus Garvey famously remarked that “a people without knowledge of their history is like a tree without roots.” *Reversing Sail* retraces and documents the rich, diverse history and culture of the African diaspora. This reversing sail that Michael Gomez captains resonates an important message: if we are to truly appreciate the contributions and complexities of Africa and its diaspora then we have to journey back to its past that predates slavery, colonialism and exploitation. The metaphor of reversing sail is even more powerful because it echoes the Akan concept of sankofa - literally, to return in order to move forward.

Gomez embarks on the ambitious odyssey of chronicling millennia of African history and culture from ancient Egypt to the late 20th century Diaspora. It is here that both the stellar contribution as well as the key weakness of the book is to be found. The noble effort of documenting Africa and its Diaspora's history ends up rushing and oversimplifying much of its meaningfulness and complexity.

The book is not a classic and does not need to be. However there is great value in its eclectic compilation of arguments and sources scattered in a plethora of places. It presents an accessible and readable narrative of a story that is far from linear. *Reversing Sail* and its thrust for a new approach to African history must be credited with emphasizing that the scourge of slavery is not the event that places Africans and their descendants into “history.” Africa 's recorded history preceded both the slavers as well as the racism that blessed them on their way from Europe to Africa . Its primary readership will be undergraduates and its lack of proper textual notation is heavily compensated for by a very helpful list of further readings.

Apart from the readability of the text, the structure is also quite uncomplicated. The book is divided into two parts. The first is “Old World Dimensions” and tells the story of Africa prior to European contact and the journey through the middle passage to the Americas that resulted in “Maafa.” In the first chapter, Gomez skillfully navigates the story of African antiquity and is careful to (re)iterate that Africa 's ancient history is not just that of Egypt , Ethiopia and Nubia , but extends across the Horn of Africa. The main impetus of this recounting of antiquity is to debunk the myth that Africa and its progeny were “fated to be subjugated” and more importantly, to reveal the intellectual debt that Western and human civilization owes to Africans and their systems of learning and progress.

The depth of the relationship between Africans and religion is adequately addressed. From the spirited discussion of “Africans and the Bible” which outlines the complexity of the text and its unfolding as history, to the realization that the Bible has been used both as a guide for

liberation and African pride [given their critical role in the text itself], as well being the “divine justification for African slavery and subjugation.”

In Chapter 3, Gomez continues to examine religion and the African diaspora by examining “Africans and the Islamic World.” He assesses how “millions of Africans entered Islamic lands, where they made important contributions to extraordinary civilizations...” (p. 29). In detailing this penetration of Africans into the Islamic world, Gomez continues to connect the dots that lead to the birth and development of African slavery in the modern world.

Part 2, “New World Realities,” begins the torturous journey of Africans to the New World . The “energetic Europe [that] burst on the world scene” (p.59) was bent on the exploitation and enslavement of Africans as the vehicles for its progress and enrichment. Gomez is however quick to reveal that it was “several global developments [that] gave rise to the transatlantic slave trade” (p. 59). Nonetheless the highlighting of the varied events that led to slavery is in no way an attempt to abrogate primary European culpability for the dehumanization of Africans. Throughout the next few chapters *Reversing Sail* is a critical assessment of the reality that “Europe’s...economic prosperity was fundamentally related to exploitation of Africans,” an argument so rightly credited to historian Eric Williams. (p. 82).

The chapter entitled “Asserting the Right to Be” outlines the way in which scattered Africans had to reassert their freedom to a system of oppression that had dehumanized them for centuries. More importantly the chapter reveals the persistent interconnectivity of the struggle against slavery. From the slave revolts all over the Caribbean , Latin America and the U.S. to maroonage to the intellectual assault of abolitionists, it was obvious that the links between the African diaspora were parts of a chain that always went back to Africa . The ‘transatlantic moment’ through the middle passage “did not completely rupture ties to the homelands” (p. 79).

The final two chapters complete the circumnavigation of the African diaspora to their ancestral homeland in the form of physical and psychological reverse of sail or repatriation. It was apparent that Africa’s progeny “were reversing sail in their minds and hearts, if not with their bodies” (p.162). Not only did the diaspora reconnect with Africa but it also created sub-diasporas such as Caribbean blacks migrating to the U.S. in the 19 th and early 20 th century. The mobility of the African diaspora meant the dynamic melding and reshaping of culture, politics and the inevitable challenge against all the forms of oppression blacks had become subjected to (p.193). The final word in this “gem” of a book points to the reality that the reconnections with Africa , the place of origin and human civilization, needs to be deeper and more practical given the current era of despair and impoverishment across the black world.

Reversing Sail has accomplished its goal of being “an interpretive history of the journey of people of African descent.” The book is a meaningful primer for persons who doubt the simplicity of the declaration that Africa and Africans did not enter history as slaves and impoverished nations.

J. Omar McCalpin
Brown University

Popular Intellectuals and Social Movements: Framing Protest in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Michiel Baud and Rosanne Rutten, eds. Cambridge University Press, 2005. 222 pp.

As part of a larger effort to capture the public imagination and galvanize support, social movements invest considerable time and energy developing frames that interpret and articulate a particular understanding of social reality. The stakes for movements are potentially enormous: organizations that can offer meaningful and resonant frames are better equipped to mobilize activists, influence public opinion, and ultimately, enhance their leverage—all of which can significantly improve their chances of affecting political change. The importance of framing has not escaped social movement scholars, many of whom have provided careful analyses of how movements develop, contest, transform, and deploy a range of possible frames in a variety of movement settings. This attention to framing has quite properly incorporated cultural considerations into movement scholarship (thereby balancing out an otherwise strongly structural tendency) by refocusing on the content, identities, and messages of movements, not just the organizations and political environments in which they operate.

Yet this attention to framing has been somewhat skewed, insofar as scholars have spent much of their time examining framing *processes* and *mechanisms* rather than on the individuals who perform the actual work of constructing meaning and interpreting reality. This lack of agency is a critical gap that this volume, edited by Michiel Baud and Rosanne Rutten, seeks to fill. In their introduction, Baud and Rutten note that although “framing is the work of individuals...many studies tend to invest social movements with an agency of their own, and fail to take a closer look at the men and women who are instrumental in interpreting conditions and articulating demands” (p. 2). The eight essays they have assembled address this issue from a number of different angles. Together, the authors cover a diverse range of movements and countries, from the importation and transformation of Gandhi's non-violent principles from India to the United States, to the impact that different formative experiences had on groups of nationalist intellectuals in Mali and Nigeria, to framing disputes and factionalism within al-Qaeda.

Given the diversity of topics and geographies, it would be easy for a volume of this type to lack a set of integrating themes apart from their basic focus on the individuals involved in framing processes. Fortunately, Baud and Rutten are able to tease out a number of ideas that draw connections among these contributions and advance our thinking beyond the simple declaration that “agency matters.” At the very least, this book pushes us to consider “whose agency matters—and how?” Not all individuals are equipped to engage in framing, and not all individuals who articulate frames succeed in persuading others of their interpretation. In fact, success in framing requires a certain minimum amount of credibility and standing within a movement. This credibility is not necessarily tied to one's status or occupation. Indeed, the book is built on the premise that framing work can be carried out by a range of popular or organic intellectuals.

At the same time, as several contributors argue, an individual's authority to promulgate a frame (and the success of that frame) is often contested by others inside the movement. Pablo S. Bose's work on the movement opposing India's Narmada dam traces one such dispute, as grassroots activists challenged the individuals who had served as very public ambassadors and spokespeople for anti-dam forces. The point of contention in this case stemmed from activists' perception that these prominent individuals lacked the local knowledge and ties to represent

the interests of activists in an authentic and legitimate way. Quintan Wiktorowicz's chapter on intra-movement framing contests focuses on this point as well, arguing that that in al-Qaeda, actors disputed each others' frames by engaging in various strategies to discredit and challenge the expertise, commitment, and religious values of opponents. These chapters suggest that we must rethink the mechanisms associated with frame disputes. The struggle over framing that occurs in all movements is not only about the content of possible alternatives but also about the character, identity, and credibility of the individuals who do the framing.

A second key theme of this book involves the role that popular intellectuals play as cultural brokers, mediating between local activists and a broader political environment. This brokerage role is possible because popular intellectuals inhabit two worlds simultaneously: they tend to emerge from the grassroots, and thus enjoy specific and grounded knowledge of a particular movement, its participants, and their preferences. At the same time, the individuals have easier access to an external political community, including fellow intellectuals in other societies and movements. This middle position, which calls to mind Sidney Tarrow's recent work on "rooted cosmopolitans," makes it possible for popular intellectuals to act as two-way transmitters. On one hand, they are able to take advantage of their transnational linkages to access innovative movement frames, tactics, and strategies, and then repackage them to appeal to local actors. Sean Chabot's work on American civil rights leaders traces this type of interaction, as he notes how religious leaders in the south emphasized the compatibility of non-violence with Christian doctrine in order to ensure a sympathetic public hearing. Reverse transmission is also possible, as Joanne Rappaport shows in her study of indigenous rights groups and the intellectuals who took local discourses and brought them to the attention of national audiences.

Taken together, this book offers some interesting insights into framing processes and explores its ideas through eight detailed case studies located in countries that are often understudied in the movement literature. As such, this book would be of interest to those interested in social movement theory as well as those with a particular empirical interest in movements located outside of Europe and North America . While the book is somewhat narrow in scope—it does not explore, for example, the various ways in which states can and do attempt to influence who engages in framing or what frames are even possible—it reminds us that messages require a messenger, and that we would be well served to pay attention not just to the frames, but the individuals who stand behind them.

Devashree Gupta
Carleton College

Prisoners of Freedom: Human Rights and the African Poor. Harri Englund. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006. 260 pp.

Harri Englund seeks to engage with what he deems "one of the most obvious features of the new era, the unprecedented public interest in human rights" (p. 5) by examining how the rhetoric of human rights gets translated as practice in Malawi . Englund provides an insightful and strong critique of neoliberal freedoms and human rights activism. Based on extensive field

research from Malawi as well as comparative sources in Zambia, Englund addresses how human rights narrowly defined can hamper struggles against injustice. Freedoms, based on abstract concepts of individualism, can actually undermine democratization rather than promote liberation. His original and compelling argument adds a critical dimension to both the intellectual debates and practical applications of democracy and human rights.

The central argument in *Prisoners of Freedom* contends that equating human rights with political freedoms serves to undermine struggles against poverty and injustice. Englund attempts to move beyond empirical debates about human rights in order to explore how things actually function in practice on the ground. To address how Malawians encountered human rights policies, Englund examines four major themes: the politics of translation, the effect of civic education projects, the limitations of legal aid, and the “moral panic” of the poor as a collective response to new policies. In his multi-lingual analysis, he argues that in many cases human rights documents are not only inaccurately translated into various languages, but that the translations are in fact detrimental to human rights. Further, he believes civic education projects — designed to empower the “grassroots” — actually serve to create a further distinction between the teachers of rights and those presumed to be in need of instruction rather than to promote change. Legal aid, particularly aid granted from international sources, is hampered by its focus on individual claims rather than structural problems. Finally, he explores the “moral panic” of 2003 in Lilongwe as an example of how the poor expressed their frustrations over their virtues, needs, and expectations not being met.

While each of Englund's eight chapters is compelling and effectively argued, his third chapter illustrates the best in thorough, well-argued scholarship. He brilliantly brings to life the intricacies of civic education in Malawi and questions whether such programs have succeeded in either alleviating poverty or creating room for debate about how best to do so. Englund's strength lies not only in his demonstrated deep knowledge of, and passion for, his study, but also in his ability to weave together vast and complex field data into an organized, thoughtful framework that keeps readers focused and engaged. He succeeds in both linking and drawing distinctions between universal concepts and local realities. Englund demonstrates that “the very idea of human rights may, despite its universalist pretensions, assume a highly particular content” (p. 146) to argue for alternative forms of democracy, ones that are more flexible in their approach to human rights and take into account the realities of peoples' lives and needs.

If Englund seeks to expand the definition of human rights and examine how injustice is experienced by the poor, his argument could be further strengthened if he included more in-depth analysis about gender. In his discussion about the balance between rights and responsibilities, Englund uses the debate about “too much freedom” to illustrate how youth and women were blamed for social subversion rather than seen as victims of structural inequality. While he points out that “the potential in the translated human rights discourse to incite subversion became apparent in generational and gendered tensions” (p. 66), he does not draw out what these inequalities are or how his perspective could effectively address them. Further, in another section where he outlines Malawian fears about the safety of schoolchildren, he mentions that the fears were heightened by the mutilated bodies of women and a schoolgirl, but provides no analysis of this gendered violence.

While critics may argue that Englund does not give enough credit to local, national, and international attempts to improve the conditions of Malawians, a careful reading of his work reveals an analysis that encourages increased collaboration rather than a dismantling of

programs. Englund sets out to expand the definition of democracy of human rights, and provides vast data to argue that what “freedom” means for the poor often does not correspond to limited notions of individual political freedoms.

Overall, Englund is convincing and effective in his fresh and critical questioning of how limited notions of freedom and democracy serve the poor. *Prisoners of Freedom* is an bold and important addition to scholarship about human rights because it traces how philosophical notions are put into practice. Further, the book is exceptionally well-structured and researched. Englund's work will be of interest to activists and international aid workers as well as scholars of African history, economics, and politics. Although well-written and argued, *Prisoners of Freedom* as a classroom text is dense in parts and would be best used in upper-level undergraduate or graduate courses. This excellent book ultimately demonstrates that the practice of human rights is more important in the implementation of justice than mere abstractions about individual political freedoms.

Emily Musil

University of California, Los Angeles

Women in African Parliaments. Gretchen Bauer and Hannah Evelyn Britton, eds. Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006. 235 pp.

Women in African Parliaments is a comparative study of women's representation in legislatures in many Africa countries, based on qualitative data. Sources include interviews, newspapers, publications and unpublished papers by scholars, etc. With women moving into new and groundbreaking political leadership positions globally (Liberia , Chile , Germany and Jamaica), this book is very timely.

Divided into many chapters, this book addresses the reasons for the increase in women's political representation, the issues related to women's representation in legislatures, and the impact of women's MPs on legislation. It also argues that the mode of electing women to parliament, and the interpretation of the reserved seats, has also meant that women representatives have found it difficult to challenge the government in controversial matters (for example, in Uganda). It attributes the use of quotas as one big factor in the rise of women's political power in these selected Africa countries. Timothy Longman shows that in political gender balance, Rwanda leads the world (p.144). Women compose more than 30 percent of the South African and Mozambican parliaments respectively. Also, half of Rwandese members of parliament are women. Uganda is also a trend-setter having had the 6 th highest women MPs in 2005, first Female VP in Africa – Dr. Speciosa Wandira Kazibwe (Tripp, p. 113). Women also hold one third of local council seats – a leader worldwide in female representation in local government.

Despite these facts, the title of the book is rather too general and might be misleading. There are varied cultural, ethnic, religious, and particularly historical experiences in a continent made up of up to fifty-two countries. Five case studies make broader comparative observations across the continent problematic. However, the authors keep to their stated theme. The case

studies show that there are similarities in factors that facilitated women's increasing participation in their respective parliaments. For example, the book establishes the link between the election of women members of parliament in some of these countries to political office with lengthy liberation and nationalist struggles, revolutions or democratic transitions. The emergence of a democracy movement in Rwanda in the early 1990s is an example (Longman, pp.133, 142). The same applies to South Africa and Namibia .

Gretchen Bauer also observes that women contributed in many ways: "As armed combatants, 'radical, mothers,' community activists inside Namibia , university and vocational students trained abroad, and the backbone of exile camps in neighbouring countries" (p.97). Furthermore, the specific situation for women in post genocide Rwanda also drew more women into the political area. This was associated with their experience in civil society and as refugees in Uganda which formed an important basis for their entering politics.

The book successfully attributes the rise in women's representation to other factors such as information and communication technologies (ICTs), increasing educational opportunities that gave rise to stronger female leadership, changing donor strategies (p. 113), and global women's movements. For example, there was a strong presence of Rwandan women in civil society (for providing social needs) before the 1994 genocide. Women's organizations in Rwanda also promoted government's policies of setting aside reserved positions for women as well as encouraged the population to support the candidacy of women through educational programmes. In addition, some of the countries studied have drawn up constitutions, and laws that use a gender-neutral language forbidding discrimination on the bases of sex (p. 99-100).

Brief historical backgrounds are appropriately used to enhance the reader's understanding of prior situations, and the book illustrates that similarities of experience may not necessarily mean identity in their interpretation for women MPs - they vary depending on country. Women's political representation translated into women-centered policy initiatives substantively in some of these countries, but not equally in all of them. For example, South African women MPs have made key "cultural changes to the environment of parliament that honor and accommodate the domestic obligations of members of parliament" (Britton, p. 70).

At the same time, Jennifer Leigh Disney's view is that women's political representation does not necessarily translate into women-centered policy initiatives. As Bauer observes: "In contrast to the situation in South Africa, women MPs in Namibian have not managed to make their national legislatures more women or parent-friendly" (p. 104).

There was clear diversity in the existence of country-specific variations in constraints towards advancing women's rights (p. 119) – sometimes marriage is a basic criterion for women contenders, and single women and divorcees spend time explaining their status. There are problems of state manipulation of women leaders (p. 112), and the use of female-friendly policies to serve other purposes. In Senegal, religious constraints result in women's inability to make major gains in achieving political power (Greavey, pp. 154, 157, 166).

One interesting aspect of the book is that it highlights the point that women's successes in elected office and in activist organizations do not always seem to be reinforcing each other. The solution according to Shireen Hassim (p. 179), is effective transformation as it will help women parliamentarians accomplish more goals. Applying this solution to the breadth of the African experience becomes problematic. Africa is a continent. Expanded case studies are needed to counter this problem. Overall, this book shows that until women are fully represented in politics, laws will not reflect the realities of their lives (Disney, chapter 2). A recent United

Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) report, titled *The State of the World's Children 2007*, shows that women's involvement in government tends to result in gender-friendly policies. Yet, women are underrepresented in legislatures around the world due to lower levels of education, social attitudes and their greater work-burden.

With appropriate its title, this book is suited for parliamentarians, middle and senior level government executives and officials, women and men in local governments, political parties, research and training institutes, and civil society organizations and non-government organizations who are leading or participating in governance reform initiatives in their respective countries, especially in Africa.

Chineze J. Onyejekwe
Northern Arizona University

Fiscal Disobedience: An Anthropology of Economic Regulation in Central Africa. Janet Roitman. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005. 233 pp.

Travelers in Central Africa know the risks of mobility in an age of declining economic fortunes and increasing violence, whether from poor roads or from authorities demanding gifts, money, and proofs of identity. Traders and workers struggle to operate as officials and independent entrepreneurs exact payments or pillage trucks and stores. Since many supposed bandits are in fact directly or indirectly serving government authorities themselves, it is little wonder that so many Africans have questioned the legitimacy of African states and challenged the ability of the state to monitor and organize commercial activity. How do different people and institutions construct what are legitimate and illegitimate forms of obtaining wealth and intervening in commerce? This study examines the political rationalities and discursive foundations of economic regulation in northern Cameroon during the 1990s. Drawing extensively from Michel Foucault's concept of governmentality and the ability of power relations to both control and create subjects, this book seeks to uncover varied understandings and techniques of fiscal classification dating back to the era of the Sokoto caliphate. For historians and anthropologists trying to understand the problematic nature of state economic regulation and constructions of licit and illicit behavior, this is a fascinating work, even if much of the author's contentions lie on a relatively thin amount of evidence that cry out for further research.

This study should be considered a collection of related essays rather than a coherent anthropology of fiscal regulation. In keeping with the author's post-structuralist framework, the book eschews linear narratives. Roitman contends that political sovereignty over economic and other matters should not be taken as a given, but rather as a concept that emerges from configurations of power that are continually remade and undermined. Such state-sponsored initiatives as forcing Africans to pay taxes in francs, the creation and dissolution of prices controls, and the use of censuses to track mobile and fluid communities helped to construct subjects of fiscal regulation. She takes a genealogical approach to trace the emergence of political rationalities and vocabularies, such as the efforts by colonial and post-colonial regimes

to insert and impose notions of tax and price on people in northern Cameroon. Older Hausa market hierarchies determined what made a price just through the exclusion or subordination of non-Muslims or newcomers, and continue to influence understandings of what are acceptable or unacceptable economic behaviors and actions today.

A strength of this book is its presentation informal economic activity as not a sign of the weakness of state authorities, but rather as a constructed area of activity that allows for the production of wealth and state intervention. Despite many public condemnations of unregulated economic activity, officials themselves regularly permit and engage in smuggling and robbery. Young men engaged in demanding payments, taking spoils from passing trucks, or selling gasoline without any permits contend they are entrepreneurs seeking wealth and opportunity, and argue in varied ways that they ought to be or in fact are favored by state authorities. Colonial officials presented mobile traders and state-appointed chiefs as both agents of order and unscrupulous producers of wealth much as their contemporary counterparts in the military-commercial nexus are embodied as both vicious criminals and disciplined businessmen in northern Cameroon. Ethnographic discussions of the views of petrol vendors, wary robbers who prefer to present themselves as foot soldiers seeking to make a living amidst bigger power struggles, and debates over proper behavior by butchers make for interesting reading. More analysis of these excerpts would have strengthened this book.

However, there are some serious conceptual and methodological problems here. It is hard not to share the author's mixture of concern and respect for her informants, but how representative are they of informal commerce and state interventions in the economy as a whole? Women traders are almost entirely absent from this account. It is highly unlikely that they would engage in shaping and challenging fiscal regulation in the same way as the entrepreneurial armed and mobile young men who take center stage here. Are conditions elsewhere in the "Lake Chad Basin," from northern Nigeria to southern Chad and the western Central African Republic the same as northern Cameroon, as the author seems to suggest? The historical accounts of understandings of proper and improper ways of appropriating wealth and constructing economic categories from the Sokoto era to French colonial rule are insightful, but would be better seen as recommendations for further inquiry than reliable in themselves, since they draw on second-hand accounts or a selection of colonial reports. One would think that the period of German rule might get some attention as a transitional period of plural understandings of fiscal regulation, for example. It actually is never discussed at all. Finally, one needs to be forewarned about the prose that awaits them in this book. What may appear to some as provocative exegeses of Foucauldian concepts can appear to others as rough going.

This book merits reading as an inspiration for new research approaches and as a creative mediation on governmentality in a post-colonial context. However, if one is searching for a comprehensive review of informal and formal economic activity in northern Cameroon, or in contemporary Africa generally, they should look elsewhere. Instructors selecting books for undergraduate classes should stay away from this work, but it would make for interesting reading for graduate courses on economic anthropology or the state in modern Africa.

Jeremy Rich
Middle Tennessee State University

Developmental Local Government: A Case Study of South Africa. Jaap De Visser. Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2005. 313 pp.

The book seeks to find an answer to the critical question of what institutional choices a transitional state needs to make in order to facilitate the emergence of a developmental local government. The author examines the claim that decentralization is good for development. The strength of this book lies in the author's tenure as a local governmental researcher in South Africa. He had also advised and trained many municipalities thus knowing what was happening on the local level.

The book interrogates the role of the state in achieving development. The author looks at the conventional wisdom in the developing world which concluded that development is best achieved through a centralized development strategy. The author argues that the failure of this centralized development strategy has brought about the emergencies of decentralization to local government as one of the means to turn the tide of underdevelopment. Sustainable development is at the very heart of South Africa's Reconstruction and Development Programme, as it places many of these concerns, and in particular meeting basic needs, at the centre of the agenda of the growth process itself. Sustainable development is not something that can happen easily. It requires, amongst other things, a massive educational effort so that citizens are made aware of the need to manage resources wisely to achieve the maximum benefits at the minimum cost, not only to fulfill their own needs today, but those of their children tomorrow and of future generations.

The author further argues that decentralization is an indispensable tool towards development. It enhances government's capacity to gauge people's needs and strengthens the link between state and society. He further argues that decentralization has important positive consequences for the ability of people to exercise choice by holding their government accountable. This is important as it allows voters to exercise their votes more intelligently in local elections than in national elections. Furthermore decentralization meets the increasing need for local articulation of identity in a fast globalizing world environment. The author defines development as a quest for the improvement of material well being, enhancement of choice, and equitable redistribution. The aggregate of these three is best achieved through a decentralised effort.

The author argues that participation empowers local people. Community empowerment means far more than having an access to social grants by donors and government. Capacity indeed needs to be strengthened and build up, but not as a prerequisite for supporting a community. Rather the approach should be learning by doing and building capacity through experience, including allowing space for trial and error. Expertise is best found in local knowledge and know-how. The book also covers detailed functions of a municipality that includes the role of elected councillors and ward committees. The book also provides a comprehensive overview of the South African design for local government.

Three institutional principles were proposed by the author that should inform the decisions made by transitional states in creating an environment that is conducive to development at local government level. The South African legal framework for local government was used as a case-study and assessed against the backdrop of these principles. These principles are proposed to assist in making institutional choices that seek to unlock local government's development

potential. The principle of autonomy is critical to ensure that local governments can fully exploit their potential to respond to people's needs. Autonomy is comprised of local democracy, power and financial autonomy.

The principle of supervision seeks to ensure that national government maintains oversight over the decentralized development effort. Supervision comprises regulation, evaluation/intervention and redistribution. The third principle of cooperation emphasizes a spirit of cooperation as a prerequisite for success. The balancing act between autonomy and maintaining supervision should not take place in an institutional vacuum: certain elements should be entrenched in the institutional framework along the lines of a principle of cooperation. The principle requires four elements to be addressed in the institutional design: a normative framework for intergovernmental relations, the institutionalisation of vertical as well as horizontal integration, and the inclusion of mechanisms for inter-governmental relations.

The author for the first time produces an institutional model for developmental local government that is not only based on development and decentralization theories but is also tested in practice. With this book, Jaap De Visser has provided a detailed analysis of a developmental local government in South Africa and proposed an institutional model for developmental local government. The author makes a strong recommendation for a decentralized system as an indispensable tool towards development. The important conclusion from the South African case study is that decentralization at local government level is good for development. The case study was comprehensive and it addresses the aim of the book.

Didibhuku Wellington Thwala
University of Johannesburg