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## **African Culture and Personality: Bad Social Science, Effective Social Activism, or a Call to Reinvent Ethnology?**

JAMES E. LASSITER

**Abstract:** Western social scientists abandoned typical personality and national character studies during the 1960s. However, many sub-Saharan African scholars in various disciplines, those resident on the continent and elsewhere, have continued to identify, describe and make use of what they consider to be widespread African psychological characteristics and patterns of cultural adaptation. These include core African cultural values and themes, and what the scholars believe are common African responses to the requirements of social life and external cultural influences. To them, the analysis and use of these widely shared values, themes and adaptive responses are crucial for achieving viable and sustainable African national and community development. In fact, a number of the thinkers argue this endeavor is necessary for the ultimate survival of Africa and its cultures. In contrast, Western and non-Western social scientists have given up pursuing such broad concepts and adaptive processes as areas of invalid and/or harmful social science inquiry. This paper attempts to identify and assess the nature, range, quality, and utility of research and writing by selected African scholars on African culture and personality and recurring African responses to indigenous social life and Western acculturation. It does so by reviewing and analyzing a sampling of writings by African scholars published since the mid-1960s. Generally, the paper asks: What are African scholars, commentators and the public, saying about Africa's various ethnicities and Africanness and why is it important to them? The feasibility of applying such understandings to the socioeconomic conditions and practical problems of contemporary African societies is also examined. In terms of social science theory and methodology, the paper offers justification for reinstating within anthropology, and more specifically ethnology, the study of African and non-African core values, cultural themes and patterns of response to social needs and external cultural forces. Finally, the contrast between the approaches of social scientists and the African scholars surveyed is discussed in the context of the historical shift in the social sciences from generalization to particularism; and, more broadly, in the context of the rise and dominance of individualism over communalism in the global community.

### **BACKGROUND**

This paper surveys and assesses the writings of selected African scholars on what they regard to be pan-African culture and personality traits, and patterns and processes of African

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<http://www.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v3/v3i3a1.pdf>

cultural adaptation <sup>1</sup>. Suggestions are also made for reinventing the study of African social, cultural and psychological characteristics, and using such knowledge to help solve socioeconomic problems in Africa. Finally, comments are made regarding the impact of sociocultural particularism and Western individualism on the study of culture and cultural evolution.

During the late 1950s and 1960s, national character and typical personality studies were broadly condemned, breathed their last gasp, and were ultimately relegated to the dustbin of bad social science. Since that time, various African scholars outside the social sciences have nevertheless been sustaining and redirecting group personality inquiry. They are not, however, approaching their subject as did Western social scientists in the first half of this century who used questionnaire instruments to determine if Africans were "traditional" or "modern" <sup>2</sup>. This was a particularly popular approach among Western occupational psychologists working in Africa in the 1950s and 1960s who sought to scientifically assign statistical coefficients of modernization to African populations. They did this, for the most part, to find out which African groups were better suited for white or blue collar work in the colonial and post-independence socioeconomic setup <sup>3</sup>. The majority of prior culture and personality researchers focusing on Africa were interested in creating and testing a "traditional/Western measuring device" (Dawson 1967), "assaying psychological modernization" (Doob 1967), or "measuring individual modernity" (Smith and Inkeles 1966, Kahl 1968, and Gough 1975 and 1976).

African scholars writing on these subjects since the early 1960s have taken a humanistic, liberating or empowering approach. They have been specifically interested in identifying and explaining African psychological processes, personality characteristics, and the processes of African cultural adaptation to indigenous social conditions and exotic influences. For example, the work of University of Nairobi philosophy professor Joseph M. Nyasani (1997), which features prominently in this paper, is a recent attempt to define the "African psyche."

## CURRENT WESTERN PERSPECTIVES AND METHODS

Since the 1960s, the predominant approach to social and cultural research among social scientists has been to examine a clearly defined society, population, sector, geographically defined area, or topic. Such research tends to steer away from cultural and psychological generalizations at higher levels of social organization such as the ethnic group, society, nation or geographical regions such as sub-Saharan Africa. Culture and personality and broad cultural adaptation studies became and remain the target of the most severe criticism by social scientists and social advocates. Many, in fact, consider such inquiry to be no more than unscientific stereotyping, usually with malevolent intent and effect. Some argue that group personality studies are an anathema to cultural relativism and the particularistic study of singular populations and topics. Still others go as far as to assert that all culture and personality studies obscure the uniqueness of the individual, and divert attention and resources from more fruitful lines of inquiry such as the dynamics of class struggle and the scientific study of particular social structures and functions. At its worst, critics and social advocates say, group personality studies and inquiry into broad patterns of cultural adaptation on the part of social scientists exacerbate racism and bigotry. So, for the sake of not giving legitimacy to broad cultural

generalizations, which the detractors say will most likely be misused to oppress or persecute a particular group, all efforts in the social sciences to identify and study core cultural traits and make cross cultural comparisons in search of broad patterns of cultural adaptation are condemned and rejected.

I do not mean in any way to disparage particularistic types of academic and problem-oriented research. African social scientists, in general, like their Western particularist counterparts, have also moved toward greater topical and problematic specificity in their social research to more accurately focus their efforts <sup>4</sup>. However, the work of African scholars outside the social sciences, such as that surveyed here, suggests that it is time to reintroduce culture and personality and cultural adaptation studies of contemporary populations into the social science mainstream.

## AFRICAN PERSPECTIVES AND METHODS

From the early sixties to the present, African scholars outside the social sciences have consistently claimed that there have been, are and will continue to be widespread psychological and cultural themes and patterns that there are unique to sub-Saharan Africa <sup>5</sup>. They also argue that these broad themes and patterns are undergoing rapid change in a similar manner and most often for the worse throughout most of the continent. The strength of their commitment to these concepts is reflected in the fact that the scholars persist in their efforts despite a historical intellectual context that eschews such inquiry. This survey reveals they have done so to clarify and extol the virtues of what it means to be African in the face of increasing global Westernization, and to identify and promote the importance of "Africanness" in African national and regional development. African scholars also seek to reassert Africa's importance in the broader philosophical and cultural evolution of humankind. Although some of the works contain significant methodological shortcomings which will be addressed below, most of the scholars' assertions and arguments are well-reasoned and extremely compelling.

Social scientific approaches to African culture and personality are regarded by many African thinkers to be part of a long-standing and concerted Western effort to suppress and dominate Africans (See especially Thairu [1975] and Nyasani [1997]). In contrast, African scholars' approaches outside the social sciences have been theoretically and methodologically eclectic and intended to protect and liberate Africans, not dominate or control them. For example, Kenyan medical doctor and author Kihumbu Thairu (1975) offers a personally challenging approach that focuses on the need for Africans to rediscover who they are, independent of their assimilated Western values and ways of thinking and behaving.

South African professor and former Deputy Vice-Chancellor at the University of the Witwatersrand M. W. Makgoba (1997), using a more practical and problem-focused approach to bring matters back to the social scientists, sees a prominent and practical role for African social scientists in the post-colonial reconstruction of Africa. He writes:

Africa has faced some of the great social changes in this century in terms of race, ethnicity, politics, violence, labour relations and industrialisation. Graduates in the social sciences are going to be a critical component to the success of African democracies as they struggle to emerge from the mess in which they have been. Universities are not only essential for the



training and nurturing of highly-skilled scholars in this area, but are poised to make a unique contribution to the overall development of post-colonial Africa (1997:180).

## AFRICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS

All the scholars surveyed believe there are categories and processes of thought that are unique to Africa. African scholars also believe that the African way of organizing and cognitively engaging the world derives from a strongly restrictive indigenous sociocultural milieu, and that this approach to social life and the broader world has been negatively effected by Western cultural influences. Regrettably, however, the African scholars surveyed sometimes use what is normally regarded to be social scientific terminology in making reference to what they regard to be widespread African psychological and cultural characteristics, yet do not clearly define or qualify such usage. With the exception of Geyekye (1988), they also fail to clearly and consistently link their assertions and arguments to historical and ethnographic data. For example, political scientist and historian Ali A. Mazrui, in his most recent attempt to place Kiswahili language as a crucial element in East Africa's political and economic development and ultimate regional integration, refers to the "East African mind" as follows:

"The psychology of living together is also undergoing a change - and Kiswahili is part of the new *East African mind* in communion with the modern world" (Mazrui and Mazrui 1995:134). Further, Mazrui's collaborator and linguist, Alamin M. Mazrui, in a discussion of nationalism and the contributions of African Americans to Africa, states that "African Americans have made important philosophical and political contributions to the formation of movements like Negritude, pan-Africanism, and the *African personality*" (1995:161, emphasis mine).

Nyasani (1997) is no more reticent in his vaguely defined references to the "African mind" and its characteristics. He believes that "in the same way reference is made to the Greek or Roman civilization, it must be quite appropriate and legitimate to refer to a *particular strand of mind that is quite peculiar* to Africa and which shapes the prevailing conditions or permits itself to adapt to those conditions. ... (T)here is a *distinctive feature about the African mind* which seems to support the claim that *the mind in black Africa may not necessarily operate in the same strict pattern as minds elsewhere in the world....* (I)t is the way our mind functions and operates under certain conditions that we are able to arrogate to ourselves a peculiar status, *social identification and geographical label*" (1997:51-55, emphases mine).

According to Nyasani (1997:56-57), African, Asian and European minds are products of unique "cultural edifices" and "cultural streams" that arose from environmental conditioning and long-standing cultural traditions. Within the African cultural stream, Nyasani claims, are psychological and moral characteristics pertaining to African identity, personality and dignity. Makgoba (1997) goes further and argues that throughout the African Diaspora peoples of African descent:

"are linked by shared values that are fundamental features of African identity and culture. These, for example, include hospitality, friendliness, the consensus and common framework-seeking principle, ubuntu, and the emphasis on community rather than on the individual. These

features typically underpin the variations of African culture and identity everywhere. The existence of African identity is not in doubt" (1997:197-198).

Regarding personality characteristics he believes to be inherent in the African mind, Nyasani identifies and discusses sociality, patience, tolerance, sympathy and acceptance as:

"areas in which the African mind seems to reveal itself in a somewhat dramatic way. It reveals itself through what may rightly be called a *congenital trait of sociality or sociability*. It further reveals itself as a *virtuous natural endowment of patience and tolerance*. And lastly it manifests itself as a *natural disposition for mutual sympathy and acceptance*. These three areas then appear to serve as important landmarks in the general description of the phenomenology of the African mind" (1997:57, emphases mine).

Caught in a social pyramid characterized by a one-way vertical authority structure and a two-way horizontal family and communal support system, the African mind, beset with superstition and destabilized by Western acculturation, is relatively unilinear, uncritical, lacking in initiative and therefore "encapsulated," says Nyasani. This, Nyasani (1997) insists, has been extremely negative for Africa, especially in terms of the African individual's creativity and ability to innovate:

(W)hat we experience in the practical life of an African is the apparent *stagnation or stalemate in his social as well as economic evolution....* It is quite evident that the social consequences of this unfortunate social impasse (encapsulation) can be very grave especially where the process of acculturation and indeterminate enculturation is taking place at an uncontrollable pace.... By and large, it can safely be affirmed that *social encapsulation* in Africa works both positively and negatively. It is positive in as far as it guarantees a modicum of social cohesion, social harmony and social mutual concern. However, in as far as it *does not promote fully the exercise of personal initiative and incentive*, it can be regarded as negative (Nyasani 1997:130-131, emphases mine).

## AFRICAN SOCIETY AND THE INDIVIDUAL

The African scholars surveyed, with the possible exception of Ghanaian philosopher Kwame Gyekye (1988), regard African concepts of the individual and self to be almost totally dependent on and subordinate to social entities and cultural processes. Kenyan theology professor John S. Mbiti (1969 and 1992), for example, believes that the individual has little latitude for self determination outside the context of the traditional African family and community. He writes:

"Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say: 'I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am.' This is a cardinal point in the understanding of the African view of man" (1969:109).

For Ghanaian philosopher Kwame Gyekye (1988), the individual, although originating from and inextricably bound to his family and community, nevertheless possesses a clear concept of himself as a distinct person of volition. It is from this combined sense of personhood and communal membership that the family and community expect individuals to take personally enhancing and socially responsible decisions and actions. Although he accepts that the dominant entity of African social order is the community, Gyekye believes "it would be

more correct to describe that order as amphibious, for it manifests features of both communality and individuality. ... African social thought seeks to avoid the excesses of the two exaggerated systems, while allowing for a meaningful, albeit uneasy, interaction between the individual and the society" (1988:31-32).

Agreeing with Gyekye, Senegalese philosopher Leopold Senghor (1966) regards traditional African society to be "based both on the community and on the person and in which, because it was founded on dialogue and reciprocity, the group had priority over the individual without crushing him, but allowing him to blossom as a person" (1966:5).

South African philosophy professor Augustine Shutte (1993), citing the Xhosa proverb *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (a person is a person through persons), writes:

This (proverb) is the Xhosa expression of a notion that is common to all African languages and traditional cultures.... (It) is concerned both with the peculiar interdependence of persons on others for the exercise, development and fulfilment of their powers that is recognised in African traditional thought, and also with the understanding of what it is to be a person that underlies this.... In European philosophy of whatever kind, the self is always envisaged as something "inside" a person, or at least as a kind of container of mental properties and powers. In African thought it is seen as "outside," subsisting in relationship to what is other, the natural and social environment. In fact the sharp distinction between self and world, a self that controls and changes the world and is in some sense "above" it, this distinction so characteristic of European philosophy, disappears. Self and world are united and intermingle in a web of reciprocal relations (1993:46-47).

In contrast to Gyekye's mutually enhancing understanding and Shutte's idea that the community empowers and inculcates "personness," Nyasani (1997) possesses a far less egalitarian view of the individual in African society. According to Nyasani, the African individual hardly knows how to act outside the context of his community's prescriptions and proscriptions. For Nyasani, the existence of the individual in African society is a "quasi-dissolution into the reality of others for the sake of the individual's existence" (1997:60). For him, "everything boils down to the 'me' in the 'we' or rather to the survival of the self through the enhancement and consolidation of the 'we' as a generic whole.... Thus, in Africa, the individual will go to all lengths to ascertain the condition of the corporate 'we' and to play his part, if necessary, to restore the balance of wholesomeness" (1997:81-82).

There are many particularistic studies of the attitudes and values of Africans by African and non-African scholars that support the assertions made by Nyasani and others regarding African concepts of self and the place of the individual in African societies <sup>6</sup>.

## THE AFRICAN FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

Nyasani (1997) identifies the traditional African family as a setting wherein the vertical power structure of the society is introduced and sustained as predominant over the freedom of individuals. For Nyasani there is a "fundamental difference between the traditional African child and a child in the Western culture. The child in Africa was muzzled right from the outset and was thereby drilled into submission to authority from above" (1997:129).

Within the communal context, Nyasani (1997) argues that Africans exhibit an

"endemic and congenital trait of what could be described as a *natural benign docility* generally brought about by years of blind social submission and unquestioning compliance to the mystique of higher authority that reigns surreptitiously yet effectively in all black African societies in varying degrees. This *benign natural docility* is generally regarded as positive, legitimate and virtuous strictly within the context of a traditional social regime" (1997:113, emphases mine).

Community norms, he says

"are merely received but never subjected to the scrutiny of reason to establish their viability and practicability in the society.... Maybe, it is because of this lack of personal involvement and personal scrutiny that has tended to work to the disadvantage of the Africans especially where they are faced with a critical situation of reckoning about their own destiny and even dignity" (Nyasani 1997:63-69).

Steven Shalita (1998), Kampala bureau chief for *The East African*, the sub-region's premier English weekly newspaper, blames the colonial past, in part, for African passivity and complacency. He argues that a

"passive attitude to life is common in many parts of Africa, where most people are satisfied with the minimum. Many Africans prefer to engage in subsistence farming rather than farming for profit and even then, they wait for some bureaucrat to tell them about food security to save them from starvation when drought strikes. ... This complacency by ordinary people can partly be blamed on the colonial legacy which put such emphasis on government. It caused them to believe that government owed them a living and if things went wrong, why then government was to blame and must find a solution" (1998:10).

## THE AFRICAN WORLD VIEW

Senghor (1966), in comparing Africans and Europeans, argues that there is a unique African world view focused on what he describes as "being" and "life forces." He writes

(T)he African has always and everywhere presented a concept of the world which is diametrically opposed to the traditional philosophy of Europe. The latter is essentially static, objective, dichotomous; it is, in fact, dualistic, in that it makes an absolute distinction between body and soul, matter and spirit. It is founded on separation and opposition, on analysis and conflict. The African, on the other hand, conceives the world, beyond the diversity of its forms, as a fundamentally mobile yet unique reality that seeks synthesis.... This reality is being, in the ontological sense of the word, and it is life force. For the African, matter in the sense the Europeans understand it, is only a system of signs which translates the single reality of the universe: being, which is spirit, which is life force. Thus, the whole universe appears as an infinitely small, and at the same time infinitely large, network of life forces..." (1966:4).

Shutte (1993), like Senghor, argues that the force or energy of life (*seriti*) is at the center of, sustains and permeates the traditional African world view. As such it

"is the most fundamental (feature) in traditional African world-views.... It is moreover a dynamic system in that the force of everything, at least all living things, is continuously being either strengthened or weakened. Human beings continuously influence each other, either directly or indirectly by way of sub-human forces or through the ancestors" (1993:52-54).

From Nyasani's (1997:97-100) perspective, the world view of the African under colonialism became one where African cultural traditions, beliefs and behaviors were regarded by Africans to be inferior when compared to non-African ways. This, he says, resulted in self-loathing among Africans. In fact, he asserts, the world view of most contemporary Africans was replaced by and therefore is in many ways indistinguishable from the European world view.

## AFRICAN RESPONSES TO FOREIGN INFLUENCES

In general, the authors surveyed argue that the African individual's response to overpowering foreign influences has been and remains derived from the personal strategy he uses for survival within the African family and community context--unquestioning acceptance and conformity. Therefore, the larger world, like his family and communal milieu, presents the African individual with an equally formidable set of circumstances and requirements he is conditioned not to challenge, is dependent on and from which he cannot escape.

Makgoba (1997) clearly identifies the motives behind the interest of this larger world of non-Africans as follows:

"Knowledge about African people is always political, useful in maintaining intellectual neo-colonialism, propagates Western culture, helps generate and perpetuate an inferiority complex (in Africans), fosters individualism amongst Africans, disrupts organisation and unity in the (African) community because there is inherent fear of a united, organised Afrocentric community, or a combination of all of the above. In short, we are (regarded to be) a people who can only succeed, realise our potential and destiny by being controlled, policed, nursed and guided by Europeans. We are (therefore) incapable of being masters of our own destiny" (1997:205).

Concerning the impact of foreign socioeconomic ideology, Gyekye (1988) argues that preeminent African leaders such as Senghor, Nyerere and Nkrumah, all of whom underwent advanced Western education, incorrectly regarded Western socialism to be compatible with traditional African communalism. The consequences of their efforts to use Western socialist ideology as a framework for nation-building in Africa were devastating, he says. Gyekye argues that African communalism is "essentially and basically a socio-ethical doctrine, not economic; whereas socialism, as I understand it, is primarily an economic arrangement, involving the public control of all the dynamics of the economy.... (Not) everything that can be asserted of communalism can be asserted also for socialism, and vice-versa" (1988:24-26).

Kenyan philosopher D. A. Masolo (1995) agrees that "the failures of Nyerere's ujamaa were due, more than anything else, to the poor sociological assessment of the causes of the apparent communalistic 'attitudes' in African traditional social relations. ... Taking the communalistic phenomenon of African traditional society as a given, Nyerere proceeded to inappropriately build upon it a social-political structure--the ujamaa system" (1995:27-28).

Culturally, it is as if the traditional African script of "submit to family and community authority and immerse yourself in and partake of all group values and norms" was rewritten during the colonial period. Through force, Western education and missionary proselytization, the colonialists subordinated traditional African authority and the values and norms of African



communalism in the minds of Africans. This new anti-African script, argues Nyasani (1997), remains deeply imbedded in the minds of contemporary Africans to the point that they:

"have adopted and assimilated wholesale whatever the West has to offer. The end result is not just a cultural betrayal but a serious case of self-dehumanization and outright self-subversion both in terms of dignity and self-esteem. Indeed there is no race on earth that abhors its own culture and is so easily prepared to abdicate it and flirt with experimental ideas which promise no more than vanity, to a large extent, like the African race.... Africa is simply overwhelmed and decisively submerged by the never-receding tide of cultural imperialism" (1997:126-128).

Psychologically, Nyasani argues that the Africans' "natural benign docility" contributed to and exacerbated Africa's widespread social and cultural demise via Western acculturation. He argues that "it would not be difficult to imagine the ripe conditions encountered at the dawn of European imperialism for unbridled exploitations and culture emasculations which left many an African society completely distraught and culturally defrocked. Indeed the exploiting schemers must have found a ready market glutted with cultural naiveties for quick but effective alienation" (1997:113-114). The post-colonial era has been no different, Nyasani says, in that contemporary "black Africa is painfully crucified on the cross of blackmailers, arm-twisters and their forever more enslaving technologies and each nail of the cross belongs to the economic aid donor nation" (1997:96)!

Regarding the impact of Westernization on African community and family life, Preston Chitere (see Kimani 1998), Kenyan rural sociologist at the University of Nairobi, offers the following observations regarding the current state of the African family in Kenya, a state or condition that exists in many other sub-Saharan African nations:

"The effects of capitalism are already being felt in our families. Individualism in society is increasing. Even families in rural areas like to operate in isolation, and those who offer any help are keen to help their immediate families only. The (conjugal) family is becoming more independent. The loss of community networks and the development of individualism have resulted in (increased occurrences of) suicide, loneliness, drug abuse and mental illness. The communal system is breaking down. The extended family had certain functions to perform, for instance, to reconcile couples at loggerheads with each other, but this is no longer the case. It is no one (else's) business to know what's happening in one's marriage today (Kimani 1998:1)."

#### APPLYING THE "NEW AFRICAN ETHNOLOGY"

Ghanaian historian Osei (1971:62-63) believes that Africa should chart its future from its indigenous cultural traditions and adopt and adapt only those aspects of non-African cultures that are compatible with Africa's needs, goals and circumstances--namely, a scientific perspective and Western educational practices. Taking a broader perspective, Thairu (1975:168-169) argues for a future of greater regional integration through educational and cultural exchanges within and between African nations. This, he says, will bring into the open pan-African cultural similarities, promote more widespread understanding and tolerance on the continent, and contribute to greater overall African unity. Philosopher Gyekye (1988) shares much of Nyasani, Makgoba and Thairu's concern over Africans too often forsaking indigenous

African values and their wholesale and uncritical adoption of Western ideologies and institutions.

One of the most unusual efforts among contemporary African scholars to apply traditional African concepts to national development is that of South African Lovemore Mbigi of the Ubuntu Institute near Pretoria. Professor Mbigi (1997), freely using expressions such as "ancient African wisdom," argues that the traditional African concept ubuntu ("I am because we are. I can only be a person through others.") is useful for African corporate and organizational executives, managers and others pursuing organizational or national transformation. Mbigi argues that "birthing rituals are important in African societies....Leaders must carry out the birthing rituals of creativity and innovation in organisations. They must have a sense of legacy and selflessness if they are going to define the ultimate mystery and meaning of human existence to their followers" (1997:37).

The emphasis on Africa's traditional past as found in the writings of Nyasani and the other African scholars reviewed in this paper, however, is not without its African detractors. Kenyan philosopher Masolo (1995), for example, in his discussion of "ethnophilosophy" (formal efforts to systematically describe traditional African beliefs and practices) finds little in Africa's past that can be applied to the present and future of the continent. He believes that

"philosophers who are seeking to revive and reinstate the traditional African philosophy as the appropriate philosophy for Africa today are ... doing disservice to Africa in trying to pretend that that philosophy is still sufficient or useful or applicable to Africa's needs, i.e., that it is able to cope with the new and modern problems and issues facing Africa today as brought in with encroaching modernization. And because this encroachment requires new methods of investigation and analysis, which must be diversified due to the complexity of the situation, ethnophilosophy just has no place in it" (1995:225).

Similarly, Gyekye (1996) abhors the fact that ancestors continue to be of paramount importance in modern and traditional African life. He also recommends that for Africa to progress scientifically and technologically, "science should be rescued from the morass of (traditional) African religious and mystical beliefs" (1996:174). Nevertheless, Gyekye insists there are many "cultural values and practices of traditional Africa (that) can be considered positive features of the culture and can be accommodated in the scheme of African modernity, even if they must undergo some refinement and pruning to become fully harmonious with the spirit of modern culture and to function...satisfactorily within that culture" (ibid.). He discusses these traditional African values at length under the following chapter headings: humanity and brotherhood, communalism and individualism, morality, the family, economic system, chiefship and politics, human rights, knowledge and wisdom, and aesthetics.

Kenyan social commentator Mwiti Mugambi (1998) pragmatically argues that the future of Africa can only be forged from accepting and mending the sociocultural present. For Mugambi it is only from aggressively addressing the practical problems found within African nations that improvements in Africa can be made. Colonial cultural hangovers, pervasive Western cultural inundation, and aid-giving arm-twisting donors are, he argues, here to stay and no amount of looking into Africa's past will make them go away. He asserts that:

"Colonisation and westernisation have brought a permanent and irreversible change in Africa.... As long as we continue talking of Africanisation and 'going back to our roots' yet we

remain quiet on the reality of modern society, we will sound foolish, out-dated and out of touch with reality. ... What African writers and scholars should do is deal with the issues that are afflicting our society such as violence, corruption and rising costs of basic needs, rather than waste time on the issue of 'Africanness'. ... (T)he effects of Westernisation are here to stay and the faster we adapt to living with them the better for us and the generations to come" (1998:III).

Finally, Sam Mwale (1998), journalist and commentator on Kenyan public policy issues, writing on U.S. President Clinton's recent visit to the continent, believes that the U.S. head of state's references to an "Africa that works" and an "African Renaissance" were premature. Mwale argues that, yes, the nations that Mr. Clinton visited have, in fact, instituted significant reforms; however, "Africa does not work" in three of Africa's four largest regional economies--Nigeria, Kenya and Congo-Kinshasa. Mwale believes that a true renaissance can only be said to have occurred when fundamental changes in how African societies operate have taken place. That "economic development on the continent is taking place in a cultural and philosophical vacuum. The cultural foundations of virtually all African nations remain undefined--an unrefined mish-mash of traditional, colonial and neo-colonial cultures and identities. From this have often arisen the clan, ethnic, racial and religious fault-lines that have been the bane of independent Africa" (1998:23).

For Mwale, an Africa "that works" would show signs of reversing the crushing conditions of poverty and low economic opportunity under which over eighty percent of Africa's people now live. Regrettably, says Mwale, not one of the countries mentioned as "working" has as its first budgetary priority solving these two most basic of problems. Mwale's solution to Africa's future lies in the emergence of ethnically pluralistic societies on the continent. He argues that:

"despite the wonderful talk of an African renaissance, there is no evidence of attempts to evolve an all-embracing culture which allows a healthy expression of diversity. Without a mosaic (national) culture that provides room for co-existence, there cannot be an inclusive political philosophy that allows all to become stake holders in government. Neither can there be a moral order--upon which all development is predicated--without a solid cultural foundation.... Africa's post-colonial trauma results from institutions, governance and economic development models without any cultural underpinnings" (ibid).

## CULTURAL RELATIVITY AND SOCIAL ACTIVISM

In the 1960s, cultural relativism came to dominate the social sciences and civil rights emerged at the top of America's sociopolitical agenda. Both historical movements were welcome and necessary for the emergence of a greater respect for the individual and his humanity, and for acknowledging and respecting cultural diversity in a rapidly shrinking global community. These changes were significant and a very much needed improvement over the narrow, ethnocentric approaches to ethnicity that preceded them. Regrettably, the response within the social sciences to the ascendance of cultural relativity and heightened ethnic sensitivity and politicization was to retreat from studying broad patterns of culture and cultural adaptation toward a narrower focus on particularistic studies of societies and cultures.

This resultant lack of social scientific interest in the study of the broader aspects of African culture and personality manifests itself in the often vague, inappropriate and less than effective



manner with which the African scholars surveyed in this paper, for example, use social scientific terms and concepts. Despite the lack of social scientific interest in this form of inquiry and the fact that there is no unanimity regarding the meaning of culture and personality terms and concepts, there are nevertheless many terminological and conceptual usages cited in the foregoing excerpts that easily exceed or violate the most liberal of social scientific definitions. This is of concern because the high intellectual status of the writers legitimizes such usage. It also misinforms and misleads non-social scientists and other readers of their works. For example, an editorial essay in the March 23-29, 1998 edition of *The East African*, East Africa's best English weekly newspaper, made the following comment on U.S. president Clinton's 1998 visit to Rwanda:

"His aim in Kigali will be to condemn the 1994 genocide and to stress that ethnic killing must be rooted out of the *African psyche*. Genocide is by no means unique to Africa but our record of *violence stemming from tribalism* is a bad one, as recent incidents in Kenya, for instance, attest. If President Clinton can convey the repugnance of the international community for this shameful and recurring madness that afflicts Africa, more power to him" (emphases mine).

This reference to the "African psyche" may well have been derived from someone on the *East African's* editorial staff having read and been convinced of the validity of such usage as it appears in Nyasani's (1997) book of the same title <sup>7</sup>.

I do not agree with those who argue that the non-participation of social scientists in group culture and personality studies is as it should be. I do accept and agree that purposeful insensitivity to the validity of any social group's ethnicity, values and beliefs is never acceptable and should be challenged from all quarters. However, cultural relativity, social science particularism, and social activism should not be allowed to block, overtly or subtly, responsible inquiry into the patterns and processes of contemporary global cultural adaptation. The African scholars, as evidenced by their generalistic yet persuasive works cited in this paper, are obviously undeterred by such inhibiting influences. As such, they should be encouraged and joined by social scientists in these areas of inquiry. Both levels of inquiry, the particular and general, are needed if for no other reason than to promote more informed, accurate, and effective international discourse and relations. An emphasis on sociocultural differences and uniqueness is important and, in fact, essential for enhancing individual identity and social cohesion, and furthering sociopolitical goals.

Particularism, however, needs to be counterbalanced and contextualized by studies that emphasize cross-cultural similarities such as the works cited in this paper. If not, the evils of cultural stereotypes, ethnocentrism and bigotry spawned by past culture and personality studies will be replaced by particularism's negative outcomes of greater cultural exclusivity, arrogance, intolerance, xenophobia, mistrust, and inter-group conflict. Put simply, it is generally recognized that conflict is more likely to arise among peoples who accentuate their differences and uniqueness rather than among those who acknowledge and celebrate their similarities. If nothing else, there should be a freeing-up of academic and public discourse such that sociocultural uniqueness is respected and the characteristics shared by related or similar sociocultural groups are acknowledged, discussed, and used to find common ground for resolving conflict and sustaining cooperation. Regrettably, free discourse of this kind does not widely characterize the current state of discourse within academia. Such discourse and goals are

also lacking in international (especially inter-governmental) relations where national and sub-national sociopolitical uniqueness, competition and efforts to control and dominate are most often touted and pursued.

## REINVENTING CULTURE AND PERSONALITY STUDIES

In light of both the strengths and the weaknesses of contemporary African scholars' efforts at generalizing about African culture and personality, I encourage among African and non-African social scientists a reinvention of African ethnology and crosscultural studies. To the particularist core of the social sciences should be added an inter-disciplinary approach where the focus is on African core cultural values, cultural themes and, most importantly, widespread patterns and processes of cultural adaptation. The focus should *not* be on stereotypes, typical personalities, modernity coefficients, etc., but rather on adaptive cultural processes and trends. The descriptions and insights derived should be firmly grounded in the substantive data of history, particularist ethnographies and applied anthropology case studies.

Reinventing ethnology along these lines will not be easy. The social sciences, in the United States in particular, it appears, are suffering from a malady similar to that in the humanities described by University of California, Santa Cruz Professor Emeritus John Ellis (1996). In his book *Literature Lost: Social Agendas and the Corruption of the Humanities*, Ellis argues that:

"academic literary criticism has been transformed" from traditional inquiry into a overarching search for relevance and significance applicable to modern society. That literature and humanistic inquiry are subverted to quests for political power such that "the universities should have an overtly political function, work directly for social and political change, and inculcate a particular political viewpoint in their students."

Every piece of literature, Ellis argues, is too often reduced to issues of race, gender and class where expressions of victimization and oppression are focused on to the exclusion of all else. Ellis argues that "if we are determined to take from literature only the attitudes that we bring to it, it ceases to have any point". A large group of contemporary scholars, Ellis notes, "have no real interest in what literature might say (in its full diversity), only an interest in what they can use it for" (1996:13).

What Ellis describes for the humanities is also true for Western social science, at least where culture and personality studies are concerned. Social scientists and/or social activists who seek to promote greater diversity in the controlling sectors of society, and related agendas, are too often the first to restrict social science inquiry to areas of theory and methodology that promote or at minimum support their particular brand of political and social activism. For example, at present, at least in the U.S., culture and personality studies or their associated concepts are condemned when they are seen as harmful to social and political change, yet embraced when they are seen as advancing such causes. This low tolerance for a wide diversity of approaches in the social sciences is such that academic freedom is stifled from a fear of offending a colleague at the academy, or being lambasted as being a bigot for suggesting that it may be worthwhile researching and describing core cultural values and broad patterns of cultural adaptation within and between large contemporary populations.

If social scientists, as Makgoba (1997) asserts, have a crucial and practical role to play in African socioeconomic development, we must identify particular and general themes and patterns of cultural adaptation and their attendant psychological processes throughout sub-Saharan Africa. The first step in expanding what are acceptable social science areas of inquiry is to look at what scholars in the lesser developed societies such as those in Africa are focusing on. This paper has made an attempt to move discussion and debate in this direction. The second step is to investigate the validity of specific claims of pan-African cultural and psychological traits and adaptive responses. The assertions made by the African scholars surveyed above suggest new areas of research as follows:

1. Do traditional African authority structures and communal proscriptions and prescriptions give rise to psychological handicaps, such as "natural benign docility" or "mental encapsulation" (Nyasani 1997:113, 130-131), that have and continue to put Africans at a disadvantage when confronting non-African cultural influences? Or, is Gyekye (1988:31-32) correct in asserting that African communalism allows for and demands individual expression and accountability; and that the causes of Africa's cultural maladaptations are to be found elsewhere? Are Masolo (1995) and Mugambi (1998) correct in insisting that the solutions to Africa's problems and its future are not to be found in Africa's traditional past, rather in addressing the problems of the present, using contemporary methods?
2. Is Nyasani (1997:51-55) justified in insisting there is such a thing as an African "mentality" or "psyche" that arose from and reflects a long history of social, cultural and environmental adaptation and acculturation? Is he justified in positing the existence of African, European and Asian "cultural streams and edifices" (1997:57)?
3. Mazrui and Mazrui (1995:1-3) argue that Kiswahili has promoted "detrribalization" in East Africa in the sense of "declining 'ethnic behavior'". Yet, they say there is "stable or even increasing ethnic loyalty in terms of emotional attachment". Do ethnographic and other sources support this? Attitude and values surveys should be conducted to test this assertion. If true, how widespread and intense are these ethnic "behaviors" and "loyalties"?
4. Are prominent Kenyan social commentator Philip Ochieng's (1998) assertions about Luo culture, group personality and origins valid? Has Luo cultural arrogance undermined their pursuit of political power in Kenya? How do Luos view their history and culture vis-a-vis other tribes and ethnic groups?

## CONCLUSION

Numerous core values, cultural themes and patterns of cultural adaptation unique to Africa have been presented in this paper, as identified in the writings of selected African scholars. Most of the writers effectively argue that there is a widespread pattern of social and cultural maladaptation within African societies evidenced by continuing national development under-achievement and less than optimal regional socioeconomic integration. This is regarded by the majority of the writers to be a post-colonial legacy, the result of ongoing external interference, and a now endemic and intense African admiration of Western culture over African culture. The African scholars' prescriptions for Africa's future focus on economic

independence through educational processes that combine Western techno-economic theory and practice with the best of African sociocultural traditions. Overall, the efforts of the African scholars examined in this paper are significant and provocative contributions to understanding Africa and its peoples. However, their works, excluding Gyekye (1988), are not clearly or consistently tied to ethnographic and historical data. This omission weakens their often innovative insights and arguments. It also prohibits independent cross-cultural comparison and verification of their generalizations and persuasive assertions. Finally, their conclusions and recommendations are weakened by their not adequately addressing cultural and behavioral variation and deviance within and outside Africa.

Social scientists, including ethnologists, should join African scholars outside the social sciences in studying the broader core values, cultural themes and adaptive responses of Africans to indigenous sociocultural circumstances and external influences. Regrettably, eminent Western scholars such as Eric Wolf (1994) continue to encourage anthropologists along the narrow path of particularism in their studies of culture in order to "take much greater account of heterogeneity and contradictions in cultural systems" (1994:7). Conceptions of race, culture and people will indeed remain "perilous ideas", as Professor Wolf calls them, if social scientists continue to avoid such broader global cultural landscapes that in fact unite us, and focus *only* on particularistic studies of societies and cultures that separate us and allow us to stand proudly apart. What is worse, however, is that without generalistic studies of cross-cultural similarities and broad patterns of cultural adaptation serving to complement particularistic studies, we risk increasing the global occurrence and intensity of cultural isolationism and arrogance, xenophobia, inter-cultural misunderstanding, and international conflict. Perilous ideas, indeed!

Anthropology should not allow itself to be influenced by or become the exclusive domain of contemporary Western culture, political correctness, or social and political activism. Anthropology, and ethnology in particular, should freely pursue a full range of understandings of culture, specific cultures and their similarities and differences, the processes of regional and global cultural adaptation, and how such knowledge can improve human living conditions. Particularistic studies of cultures, groups and sociocultural topics, alone, are not enough. To this must be added the study of core cultural values and themes, patterns of regional cultural adaptation and global acculturation. The imprecise usage of cultural and psychological terminology and concepts by scholars outside the social sciences and the social science community's refusal to attend to large group psychological processes and the broader patterns of human cultural adaptation are significant matters. They tend to draw attention away from our common humanity and destiny, and impede understanding of on-going global cultural processes of utmost importance. However, all of us, Africans and non-Africans, scholars, social scientists and the public, have a personal responsibility to ensure, by all means possible, that such broad cultural and psychological understandings are not used to legitimize injustices or promote malevolent struggles for political power and dominance.

## Notes

1. The opinions and conclusions expressed in this paper are solely those of the author. They in no way reflect or otherwise represent the policies or official positions of the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service or any other U. S. Government entity. I wish to express my sincere appreciation to the following African scholars and educators who reviewed and commented on this paper in the earliest stages of its preparation: Howard University Education Professor Emeritus Paul Emoungu, Mr. Yves Kore, M.Ed., M.P.A., and Ms. Immy Rose Namutosi, B.A., D.S.E. I am also most grateful to Anthropology Professor Vernon R. Dorjahn and Assistant Anthropology Professor Jerry Marr of the University of Oregon who reviewed and provided comments on early and later drafts of the paper. Their candid and at times sharp criticism were invaluable and greatly improved the paper in many ways. The fact that they reviewed and commented on drafts of the paper does not mean that they necessarily endorse all the opinions I have expressed, approaches I have taken, or conclusions I have drawn. The shortcomings that remain, and opinions expressed, in this article are mine alone and for which, I am fully responsible.
2. The terms "tradition" and "traditional" occur frequently in the writings of the Western social scientists and contemporary African scholars cited in this paper. However, all the scholars seldom, if ever, define the terms outright. "Tradition" and "traditional" are usually presented in contrast to terms that represent the scholars' research aims, namely how "modern" or "Western" their subjects are. For example, Smith and Inkeles (1966) defined "modern" as a "set of attitudes and values, and ways of feeling and acting, presumably of the sort either generated by or required for participation in a modern society..." (1966:353). Similarly, the African scholars surveyed give much attention to and examples of African "traditions" and "traditional African culture", yet seldom if ever clearly define the terms. For the sake of clarity and the general purposes of this paper, and as an expression of what I understand the general definition of the term to mean to the African scholars I have cited, I have employed the following working definition of "traditional African culture": generally widespread sub-Saharan African core values, beliefs, cultural themes and behaviors as they existed prior to European contact; and as they still exist, especially in the rural areas and to a lesser extent in the urban areas of Africa; and upon which many, if not most, fundamental thought processes and behaviors of contemporary sub-Saharan Africans are based and continue to be derived from.
3. See for example the works of Biesheuval (1954), Smith and Inkeles (1966), Dawson (1964 and 1967), Doob (1967), Kahl (1968), Hoogvelt (1974), and Gough (1975 and 1976).
4. Most of the African scholars' works cited in this paper have not come from social scientists. African scholars I have spoken with believe the lack of social science involvement in this area of research is due, in large part, to an inadequacy of resources in African university social science departments to support indigenous social research. They also believe it is due to the generally oppressive nature of post-independence African central governments when it comes to academics and their students studying



and exposing various social ills, including government corruption, incompetence and criminality. (Kenyan philosopher Masolo argues that this "suppression of knowledge and the resultant brain-drain remain Africa's foremost cause of underdevelopment and sociopolitical instability" [1995:50]. Therefore, since the mid-1960s, African scholars in philosophy, history, and education have made greater strides in this area than their colleagues in the social sciences primarily because central governments have seen them as engaging in "academic" or "purely intellectual" pursuits, as a result, less threatening to the status quo than are social scientists. African governments, therefore, have allowed scholars other than social scientists greater intellectual freedom of expression.

5. The African scholars focused on in this paper include the following: Senegalese Leopold Senghor (1963 and 1966); Ghanaians G. K. Osei (1971) and Kwame Gyekye (1988 and 1996); Kenyans John S. Mbiti (1969 and 1992), Kihumbu Thairu (1975), J. M. Nyasani (1997); and South Africans Augustine Shutte (1993) and M. W. Makgoba (1997). The selected works of these writers span a period of thirty-five years and come from three of Africa's major sub-regions - West, East and Southern--where the largest number of contemporary African scholars have intellectually pursued the issues associated with pan-African cultural and psychological traits and adaptive processes. As such, the selections are regarded to represent serious and significant scholarly efforts on the part of Africans to describe and/or analyze pan-African cultural and psychological traits and widespread patterns and processes of African cultural adaptation. Other key African works and commentary discussed or cited in the paper include Mazrui and Mazrui (1995), D. A. Masolo (1995) and Philip Ochieng (1998). Still other important works by African scholars addressing these topics should have also included in the review but were omitted due to their not being readily available to the author in Africa when this project began. These include H. Olela (1971 and 1984), C. A. Diop (1974), P. Hountondji (1983), Kwame Appiah (1987 and 1992), V. Y. Mudimbe (1988), Kwasi Wiredu (1990 and 1992), Yoweri Museveni (1992 and 1997) and others. Finally, a number of other important works published during the past twenty years by contemporary African scholars offering analyses and solutions to Africa's current political and socioeconomic problems were available to the author and were reviewed and considered for inclusion. However, they were excluded from the paper because they make little or no reference to pan-African culture and personality traits or patterns and processes of African cultural adaptation. These include: P. M. Mutibwa (1977), Gideon S. Were (1983 and 1992), R. I. Onwuka and A. Sesay (1985), Philip Ndegwa (1985 and 1986), Thomas R. Odhiambo (1988), P. Anyang' Nyong'o (1990 and 1992), Thabo Mbeki (1995), Eric M. Aseka (1996), and others. In limiting the scope of this paper to the works of scholars from Africa I am not discounting the efforts of Western scholars such as Aidan Campbell (1997), Richard Werbner and Terence Ranger (1996), Verena Stolcke (1995) and Eric Wolf (1994), for example, who continue to make significant contributions to the study of African and non-African ethnicity and individual and group identity. I have simply deferred for the time being trying to place my findings within the contemporary intellectual context that includes non-African scholars writing on African ethnicity and identity.

6. See for example Vilakazi (1979), Decalo (1980) and Lassiter (1983) regarding Swazi and Batswana secondary school students and university graduates.
7. The reference to "violence stemming from tribalism" is also noteworthy. Ethnically defined conflict is a symptom not a cause. It is fomented and used by individuals and groups seeking wealth and/or political power. It does not arise inherently, as the writer and many others imply, from ethnicity or ethnic values, identity, loyalty or behavior.

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## **African Culture and Personality: A Comment on James E. Lassiter**

D. A. MASOLO

The last two decades of the nineteen hundreds witnessed a pleasing upsurge in African scholarship, particularly in the humanities and social sciences. This upsurge signaled a significant shift in African studies that saw African scholars take leading discursive roles. It also shifted the nature and direction of African studies as African and Africanist scholars expanded the discursive scope through interactions across disciplines. This development was enabled by a critical dialectic whose moments are at times fair, congenial and complementary, but at other times also not quite so fair, congenial or complementary. As often occurs in academic endeavors, there have been both good and bad products, as well as good and bad criticisms. James E. Lassiter's essay, "African Culture and Personality: Bad Social Science, Effective Social Activism, or a Call to Reinvent Ethnology?", is an example of very bad criticism of some aspects of recent African scholarship.

Lassiter argues that the pollution of the social sciences in African studies is occurring mainly as a result of the freelance attitude and practice by African scholars, especially when influential scholars venture into and use concepts from disciplinary fields they have only little or no knowledge of. The result, he argues, is devastating to the integrity and growth of a tradition of scientific and respectable African social studies. He picks out a handful of works by scholars from the East and South Africa for a demonstration of the extent of this devastation. In particular, he names Kihumbu Thairu and Joseph Nyasani, two Kenyan scholars, a medical doctor and philosopher respectively, who, in his view, have ventured into discussions of what they claim to be African cultural traits (for example what they claim to be the African psyche or African personality) with total neglect of and aberration from the noble rules and methods of ethnographic studies set in place by Western cultural and social anthropologists. The result of this regulatory and methodological aberration is that "such inquiry [becomes] no more than unscientific stereotyping, usually with malevolent intent and effect." (Lassiter, p.2).

Let me surprise my readers by saying that there are points I tend to agree with Lassiter on. But such points are few and far apart compared to those I severely differ with him on. I will explain as I go along. I agree that the claims made by Thairu and Nyasani are harmfully general. Yet they are part of a much wider tradition of literature which Lassiter, perhaps only conveniently, chooses to leave out of his discussion. Although he points out correctly that part of this kind of literature is liberatory and anti-colonial, Lassiter fails to connect it to the ethnophilosophical movement in the United States which is descended partly from the ethnophilosophical and Afrocentric movement in the United States which is descended partly from ethnophilosophy and Janheinz Jahn's cultural pan-Africanism on one hand, and partly from the Pan-Africanist movement in the strict political sense, on the other. Taken together, the

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mistake of the African or African-American scholars in the heart of this discourse on cultural Pan-Africanism does not lie in the fact that they discuss African culture. One hopes here that Lassiter is not suggesting that these scholars lack the legitimacy to talk of who they think, imagine, or believe they are, or what their beliefs and practices are or should be. Their weakness, in my view, lies in attributing differences of beliefs among peoples to biology rather than to experience. This biologization of culture appears at the core of Afrocentrism as practiced in the United States today, but its recent roots, as I mentioned above, are in the premises - both stated and implied by arguments - of ethnophilosophy. My position, which Lassiter cites in support of his critique of Nyasani, was taken against this collectivist and fossilizing genetic assumption about the nature of the minds of Africans which represents it as impervious to the dialects of experience. One is therefore able to detect a dangerous contradiction in Nyasani's thesis, and this brings me to another point against Lassiter: that he chooses particularly weak and clearly problematic publications by Africans which contextualize and amplify discussions on these issues; he also discusses his selections widely out of context. For example, failure to read Nyasani's text at least partly in relation to the rest of the history of African professional philosophy over the past seven decades makes it easy for Lassiter to accuse Nyasani of obfuscating the disciplinary boundaries between the social sciences and the humanities. To say the least, Lassiter's failure to take note of recent advances in anthropological discourse, and his failure to take advantage of readily available recent publications in African philosophy are utterly inexcusable, despite his attempt to hide behind a wide but unused list of reference texts. Mudimbe, Wiredu, Gyekye, and Appiah, to mention just a few, have all recently published excellent scholarly philosophical works which top lists of cogitative discussions of significant conceptual implications of changes African societies continue to undergo.

Lassiter accuses African scholars of failing to define their new (mis)uses of well established scientific terms. But his (p.3) swipe at Ali Mazrui does not indicate that his own critical understanding and practice is better. His highlight of the phrase "The new East African mind" in a passage quoted from Mazrui and Mazrui (1995:134) suggests that he is questioning the use of the term "mind" in the passage, but one sees no difficulty at all in the context of the entire passage. He also questions the use of the term "African Personality" from another passage of the same work. The said passage, it appears to me, refers to the historical evolution and affinity between the movements which the terms stand for. For Lassiter to suggest that Mazrui and Mazrui have in the passage misused a purely psychological term (personality) clearly indicates his ignorance of the historical genealogy of that term and others listed with it. Lassiter's objection indicates his serious misreading of both the intent and the context of the text. But even worse, it appears that Lassiter takes Mazrui's and Nyasani's respective uses of the term "mind" to be synonymous. If so, this is an indication of a gravely careless reading by someone wishing to present himself in such a critical manner.

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# Language in Development Research in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Africa

KITULA KING'EI

## INTRODUCTION

Africa's development in the next millennium must be research driven. Only socio-cultural and economic investigation can provide the vital data necessary to arrive at sound, well-informed policies governing development for all facets of society. Given that most of Africa remains rural and illiterate, the issue of which language is to be a medium of research is especially crucial. Verbal communication is often the only option that trained researchers have to obtain information and attain their research goals. Indeed, this is the only method through which scientists and administrators may seek to influence social or collective behaviour and direct it toward development objectives. This paper contends, therefore, that development research in Africa has failed to make substantial improvements in the quality of life for the majority, mainly because development theory and practice have failed to exploit local languages as media for research and development work. Although, as a result of colonialism, European languages are part and parcel of Africa's heritage, these languages remain foreign for the majority of ordinary people, for whom development is intended.

Language is never simply a neutral instrument to convey meaning, but rather a culturally subjective system reflecting peoples' worldview. Language symbolizes the common beliefs and psychological make-up of the community from which it springs<sup>1</sup>. For Africa, the use of language in social research and policy must consider the mobilization of human resources for development. No meaningful change can occur without the full participation of the masses. The importance of speaking to people in their own languages cannot be over-stressed.

## DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH AS A SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

The major purpose of development research is to provide fundamental and long-term solutions to social problems. Research of this nature provides a venue for the discussion of major issues in socio-economic and political-cultural development. Social science research should ideally aim at discovering and understanding such problems. Social development remains a complex phenomenon that brings into play a multiplicity of factors. These variables are often quite fluid in nature. However, research becomes a complete waste of resources if the findings do not reflect the true feelings of the target population. Unless that happens, results and recommendations contribute little to a collective understanding of the problems or the policies envisaged. Such failure in Africa has been attributed to (a) the lack of communication between researchers and potential beneficiaries of research; and (b) little public awareness of the various findings and programmes. Overall dissemination of research findings continues to

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be very poor<sup>2</sup>. The nature and level of the discourse involved is frequently cast in complex, exclusive jargon understood only by a tiny minority of technical and academic elites. The absence of free-flowing communication between investigators and beneficiaries accounts for the bottle-to-mouth model of development research in Africa. As a result, social research over the years has become an essentially academic exercise.

## CHANGE IN HUMAN BEHAVIOUR AS A PREREQUISITE FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

As a result of IMF/World Bank assistance, the 1980s and 1990s saw the adoption of economic liberalization in Africa. Before entering an era of liberalisation and market-driven economies, the population must make a psychological leap from traditionalism into the 21st century. Only then can a society meaningfully address areas of immediate concern such as the eradication of poverty, ignorance, disease and hunger. The process of development entails not simply accelerated economic growth but also changes in traditional structures, values and practices <sup>5</sup>.

Thus, for markets to work, the crucial issue becomes how to negotiate desired social and behavioural changes. What role does the development researcher play in facilitating this process? As many scholars have stressed, unplanned or uncontrolled change in the name of modern "development" often results in social behaviours that counter the intended spirit of development. But social science research in Africa has tended to neglect the cultural and language issues of local communities. This "top-down" planning approach denies popular input and participation in the determination of economic and social policy <sup>6</sup>.

The manner of conducting policy without local development research also contributes to the isolation and alienation of the masses from the process of development. Exclusive and highly academic forums such as scholarly journals, dissertations/theses and technical ministry reports reach only a small group of intellectual elites, effectively cutting off the majority. Research results must flow through more informal and accessible channels of communication such as extension education, grass-roots conferences, workshops, exhibitions and demonstrative teaching. Such channels should be utilized when generating knowledge for broad social consumption. If information and data are to help achieve the desired development goals, they must be presented to the people in a culturally and linguistically appropriate manner. Therefore, the use of local languages/dialects that draw their idioms from an accepted cultural landscape is essential.

## THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE IN SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH IN AFRICA

The problem of understanding and effectively communicating with people in a second language represents a problem most social science researchers recognize but fail to address. In all stages of research (from problem identification to the reporting of findings) the researcher must continually bear in mind the linguistic and communication complexity at hand. Special attention should be paid to the choice of language and level of discourse because language as a system of communicative symbols only receives meaning from culture and society <sup>7</sup>.

Social science researchers can use language to study the attitudes of various African societies toward change. Through language the researcher may gain insight into aspects of



cultural tolerance, accommodation of divergent views and the mechanisms of coping with change. Language and culture play a vital part in shaping individual and collective behaviour and values. A researcher armed only with a casual level of local language competence will end up with only a partial understanding of the social phenomenon or problem under scrutiny. If a researcher cannot understand the meaning and application of various oral forms (e.g. idioms, proverbs, popular sayings, tongue-twisters, riddles, myths, legends, songs and poetry) in a given community, he or she may not fully understand the politics, economic activities, social organization and cultural values of that locality. The principal claim is not that only researchers fully fluent in local languages may engage in research. Rather, the point is to stress the crucial role of understanding local language and culture as tools of deepening research understanding that would be the case if a researcher did not use them.

Although multilingual, Africa possesses regional languages that have long enabled different far-flung communities to communicate and do business. These languages spread widely, gradually becoming culturally widespread and sometimes politically neutral. This historical process has resulted in their acceptability across and beyond the boundaries of modern states. Examples of these common languages are Hausa, Wolof, Kiswahili, Arabic, Amharic and Berber. To a lesser extent, one may also add Zulu, Shona, Lingala, Ndebele, Xhosa, Tswana and several others.

In East and Central Africa, Kiswahili is the lingua franca, having a long written tradition that has been used as a medium of education at different times in history. Since it is estimated that only 20% of people in this region speak or understand English (and even fewer know French), the potential of Kiswahili as a tool for social communication and development cannot be over-emphasized. Given the high level of lexical borrowing between Kiswahili and the languages of this region, as well as the large body of literature available in the language, social research cannot afford to ignore or overlook Kiswahili.

Having mentioned the role local languages may play in research, we may pay our attention to the national versus local cultural issues. The importance of "local" as opposed to "national" loyalties in matters of development should never escape the serious social science researcher. With the possible exception of material acquisition and embracing new values through formal education or Christianity, most Africans still owe their ethnic origins considerable loyalty and obedience. In effect, many Africans still cling to what they consider values and attitudes while practising a modicum of "modern" life. In other cases it has been demonstrated that local "traditions" are invented from new and old experiences. Social science researchers must acknowledge this in order to avoid offending research subjects and to better understand the responses they encounter. Some of these values and practices a researcher faces have a direct bearing on the community's attitude toward modern development. To an uninitiated scholar, such values and practices may only appear as remnants of a distant past, but the communities concerned often find it necessary to incorporate them in development. Rather than simply dismissing them, the researcher needs to investigate the social basis of their origins and persistence. There is no better place to start such an investigation than with the various forms of creative language such as the oral genres.



## LANGUAGE AND OBJECTIVITY IN DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH

One of the major concerns of social science research has been to understand human life and society as objectively as possible. However, since the data derives (directly or indirectly) from individuals with unique personal qualities, recent thinking on social science methodology has refuted the claim that such inquiry can ever be purely objective<sup>8</sup>. These individual qualities colour data whether the inquiry is experimental, survey or evaluative in nature. Individual differences become clear in the language of responses to various questions and in observable preferences for certain words, phrases, sentence structures and idioms. Two levels of thought based on language may be at play here. Individualised language habits or "idiolects" form part of the social personality and affect the worldviews expressed to the researcher. The social science researcher should differentiate these two epistemological types as they occur in the research discourse by analyzing meanings on both the linguistic and cultural levels. This ability directly affects the validity and reliability of the final results as the researcher attempts to distinguish opinion from fact. The effort to refine the process of communication and language use in social science is imperative to understanding the sources of authenticity in any society. In each community there are institutions and personalities regarded as the custodians of indigenous values or ways of life. These people wield untold authority within their community, often influencing language use and social thought. So by studying the expressive behaviour patterns of a subject community, social scientists gain an understanding of the meanings attached to various symbols and how these can reflect power relations. The objectivity and verifiability obtained by the social researcher in that manner is vital in formulating development policies.

## CONCLUSION

The keystone of social science research is observation. However, it is impossible to interpret such observations without the careful employment of language as a medium of communication. Utmost attention must be paid to the meaning and application of language to guard against producing distorted accounts. The language used deserves as much attention as description of the phenomena under study. Only then can observation in research reduce the chance of unnecessary errors. There are many sources for error in social research. For instance, a keen researcher may discover cases of either over-generalization or selective observation by a respondent. Although the problem can be addressed by attempts to refine such results, a more profitable alternative would be paying closer attention to patterns of the language used to respond to the researcher. Language analysis helps unearth errors emanating from misinterpretation of data, misinformation, or the mystification of cause-and-effect. These aspects are central to the success of social science research and cannot be taken lightly.

This essay has discussed the importance of language, culture and communication in social research intended to promote development. Research is a social enterprise that makes use of linguistic and cultural tools. Meaning-formation or conceptualization is a culture-bound process. The objectivity, validity and reliability of findings depend upon the researcher's ability to operate effectively within the confines of culture and language. A close relationship exists

between habits of language use and thought processes as well as between socio-cultural mechanisms and the nature of human language. Therefore, problems in social research cannot be resolved solely through the use of non-African languages that currently dominate the literature on African development. Local languages and/or dialects must also be at the core of research and development discourse. The end results for African development might be better than what we have now.

## Notes

1. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind : The Politics of Language in African Literature*. Heinemann: Nairobi, 1988, 15.
2. G. Eshiwani, Background paper to Report on Educational Research and Development in Kenya . Nairobi: Bureau of Educational Research, Kenyatta University, 1981, 2.
3. G. Warren et. al., *The Planning of Change*. New York: Hort Rinehart, 1969, 58.
4. M.S. Archer, *Culture and Agency : The Place of Culture in Social Theory*. New York : CUP, 1994, 38-39.
5. Frank Blackler (ed.), *Social Psychology and Developing Countries*. New York : John Wiley, 1983,8.
6. Penina M. Mlama, *Culture and Development*. Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1991, 8.
7. Barrie Walde (ed.), *Language Perspective*. London: Heinemann, 1982, 90.
8. Earl Babbie, *The Practice of Social Research*. Belmont: Wardsworth Publishing Company, 1992, 311.
9. F.A. Hanson, *Meaning in Culture*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975, 20-21.
10. S.H. Irvine and J.T. Sanders, *Cultural Adaptation within Modern Africa*. New York: Teachers Press College, 1972, 16.

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Kinge'i K. 1999. Language Development Research in 21st Century Africa 3<sup>3</sup>: 3. [online] URL: <http://web.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v3/v3i3a3.htm>



# The Challenges Facing Nigeria's Foreign Policy in the Next Millennium

EBENEZER OKPOKPO

## INTRODUCTION

Since Nigeria became independent in 1960 its foreign policy, like that of most other countries, has witnessed successes and failures. The current debate on President Obasanjo's list of Ambassadorial nominees sent to the Senate for approval provides Nigerian citizens with an opportunity to contribute to the debate on who should be nominated and why. I will leave relating to the "who and why" to observers more concerned with the internal political situation. My contribution will go beyond the internal debate concerning the disrespect of the "federal character" and the purported bias in these nominations. I will focus on the content and objectives of Nigerian foreign policy in the new millenium.

In his article on Obasanjo's foreign policy, Reubin Abati, gives an interesting and complete overview of Nigeria's foreign policy since its independence<sup>1</sup>. He rightly points out that Nigeria has been extraordinarily naive by restricting its foreign policy to Africa as its cornerstone. It was a laudable goal before the 1990s, but its evolution is needed for Nigeria to meet the needs of today's diplomacy as we move into the next millennium. Africa as the centerpiece of Nigeria's foreign policy no longer suffices; a broader perspective is necessary. Although Nigeria hasn't got the means and might to have a global foreign policy, it should endeavour to take more into consideration current trends in international relations and diplomacy such as globalization, human rights, and democracy.

In my opinion, successive military dictatorships in Nigeria have used the Africa cornerstone slogan to lure compliant like-minded African regimes to support their unpopular regimes. This was the price Nigeria had to pay for the support of dictatorial African states. Now, we are a democracy and we have to speak out and stand tall within the international community. We no longer have to beg for support from other military dictatorships for limited gains within African diplomatic circles. Africa alone should no longer be the one and only reason for the existence of a foreign policy in Nigeria. None of the important international diplomatic actors, such as the USA, France and Great Britain, build their foreign policy on only one pillar. Nigeria shouldn't be an exception if it wants to play a role in current high level diplomatic circles.

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## DOMESTIC DETERMINANTS OF FOREIGN POLICY

Internal political events usually have a lot of impact on foreign policy. Nigeria is no exception as the following discussion will demonstrate. Nigeria should henceforth cultivate the idea, recognise and accept that military *coup d'états* are not solutions to internal political problems. If such were the case, governments in industrialised countries would have been toppled very often because of political crises. The solution is a culture of political dialogue and debate between opponents and Nigerians are up to that task. Encouraging political dialogue as the principal mechanism for the resolution of crisis situations would show the international community that Nigerians are a mature people worthy of a respectable place within the community of nations.

When Rueben Abati mentioned that the Babangida regime gave a lethal blow to Nigeria's image abroad and its foreign policy in particular, he gave as examples the financial waste but omitted human rights abuses and the cancellation of the June 12 election at a time when every country, in particular the G7 and most OECD countries had made democracy, good governance, and human rights essential determining elements in international politics and in their relations with developing countries. It is worth noting that since the famous *La Baule* speech by President Mitterrand of France in 1983, democracy became a determining factor in relations between France and developing countries, in particular, African countries. This applied to other western states also.

Worse still, after its cancellation, no official inside Babangida's government was capable of giving cogent reasons for the annulment of the June 12 elections and accusations concerning human rights violations. The international community, therefore, rightly believed our top military officers were up to something. The aftermath was nothing to write home about. That was the beginning of Nigeria's misunderstanding with the international community – notably the USA, Canada, the Commonwealth countries, and the European Union.

The issue of June 12 had not been resolved when General Sani Abacha pushed the transition president Chief Ernest Shonekan out and took his seat without any agenda on how to improve relations between Nigeria and the international community, outside its traditional African brother countries. That *coup d'état* worsened the international image of Nigeria. No creditworthy transition programme was published; instead General Abacha embarked upon a self-aggrandising effort that led Nigeria to the brink of war because of the most flagrant human rights abuses any military regime had ever committed in the country since independence.

Nigeria became a pariah state with whom none except compliant African countries talked to. It was at this time that experienced diplomatic advice would have saved Nigeria. None was given a chance; instead a select delegation of incredible, though famous Nigerians, was sent abroad to explain the unexplainable to the international community. One such delegations led by Chief Odumegwu Ojukwu visited Europe, but its failure was obvious.

## HUMAN RIGHTS AND FOREIGN POLICY

Under General Abacha, foreign policy was crudely mishandled. Records show that Nigeria was like a country without a foreign minister and a foreign policy during that period. No one

person should be blamed for the absence of a foreign policy but someone should explain why there seemed to be no useful policy advice to General Abacha during the time<sup>2</sup>. The questions to be answered include those relating to the aimless intentional tug-of-war declared by the regime against the international community.

Explanations should be given as to why that regime was incapable of foreseeing the devastating effects of the hanging of the "Ogoni nine", including Ken Saro Wiwa, and lastly, why there was no government official capable of making the regime to shift the horrible decision to hang the Ogoni activists until the end of the Commonwealth summit. That regime unjustly imprisoned many people, including the incumbent President Olusegun Obasanjo, and hung Ken Saro Wiwa when all Commonwealth Heads of State and Government were meeting in Australia. These were all terrible acts and diplomatic blunders because they underrated the importance of internal policy including democratic reforms and the place of human rights in international relations and diplomacy.

When we hear some Nigerian's cry wolf today concerning the ambassadorial nominations by President Obasanjo, they should be asked why many ambassadorial positions remained vacant and no diplomats were posted out during Abacha's tenure of office<sup>3</sup>. Nigeria's diplomacy was grounded during the Babangida-Abacha era. This explains why the current government recalled all ambassadors and designated new ones. In Foreign Minister Lamido's words, it is in recognition of the important roles played by heads of missions that they recalled them to dismantle the "old order"<sup>4</sup>. Also, how would Nigeria have explained the confirmation by a democratically elected government of ambassadors who were apologetic to the military?

The annulment of the June 12 presidential elections and the hanging of the "Ogoni nine" were two lethal blows that those regimes gave to Nigeria's image abroad. Nigeria's bad image has not been repaired and those who contributed toward this should be humble in their utterances against the choices made by a democratically elected government.

## NIGERIA'S SHATTERED PUBLIC IMAGE

Despite immense efforts by diplomats and other officials in the Babangida and Abacha years to explain Nigeria's stance to countries outside Africa, their efforts were fruitless because Nigeria maintained an obsolete definition of national sovereignty. They argued that human rights and related issues were Nigerian internal affairs about which outsiders had no say. Yet, gone are the days when any ruler could sit down within the boundaries of his country and treat citizens as he liked without reaction from the international community. In spite of the existing double standards in the field, NATO intervention in Kosovo, former Yugoslavia, is an example. Henceforth, democracy and human rights, which in the recent past were considered in law and international relations as purely internal affairs, are becoming important determinants in foreign policy.

Though the recent crisis in East Timor (Indonesia) gave no pride for the international community, and in particular, the United Nations, the international community has tried various humanitarian and sometimes military rescue operations where there were human rights abuses. In Africa, Rwanda, during the ethnic crisis, was a case in hand. Nigerian policy and decision-makers should henceforth recognise that democracy and human rights are subjects of

international concern and they should therefore inculcate these elements into the decision-making process.

Regarding image building, it was astonishing to observe how Nigerian diplomats and information ministry officials were incapable of formulating a message destined for international consumption to counter the international press campaign against Nigeria. The incapacity of Nigerian officials at the time to explain these decisions to the international public led to the deteriorated image of Nigeria abroad. The effects are very deep-rooted and years will be required to correct the image.

President Obasanjo and Foreign Minister Sule Lamido's task is to bring Nigeria out of this dead end by consolidating democracy at home, respecting fundamental human rights and encouraging liberal economic reforms, good governance and transparency with a view to boosting international economic cooperation with G7 countries as well as the dynamic Asian economies<sup>5</sup>. The task ahead is hectic and the choice of competent officials actors is therefore essential.

## FOREIGN POLICY ACTORS

The policy actors in this immense task are both internal and external to the foreign ministry. Although it is primarily a foreign ministry affair, it should be mentioned that internal actors such as the president, the foreign minister, ambassadors and embassies abroad, the press and the business community are all active players in the foreign policy formulation process. The role and place of our embassies should be redefined. A dynamic and performance-oriented foreign policy leaves no room for amateurism like in the past. Our ambassadors and embassies should sit up and live up to national expectations. Nigeria's foreign policy has to produce results for the country and its citizens. The training programme for our diplomats should be reviewed to give them the necessary knowledge to practise the art and science of diplomacy because they are at the frontline of our foreign policy.

Our vital national interests have to be redefined. Does Africa still represent the cornerstone of our foreign policy when we have more respect from other countries than we get from African nations despite our whole-hearted commitment to them? If yes, what are the benefits we get from the choice? If the response is no, then we should reorient our foreign policy towards more profitable ventures like economic, scientific, cultural and technical cooperation with more advanced countries including Asia.

The economic development and well-being of Nigeria should henceforth be the mainstay of our foreign policy. We should revive and reinforce what was termed economic diplomacy by General Ike Nwachukwu. For instance, why would we continue to sit aloof and see Cameroun lay claim on Nigeria's territory? In the name of African unity and good neighbourhood, Nigeria has sacrificed a lot and continues to sacrifice for our continent. That is praiseworthy but most southern African countries have forgotten the sacrifices made by Nigeria to bring them out of their woes. Sierra Leoneans and Liberians have forgotten the loss of lives by Nigerian soldiers in their efforts to defend unity and peace in these countries. Though Africa should not be forgotten, Nigeria's interests should come first in all our foreign policy analysis and decisions. Retired General Danjuma wasn't saying anything different when he said "Right now, we are



becoming the United States of ECOWAS at very great cost to us. We think this is unaffordable to us now"<sup>6</sup>. He further stated that Nigeria's needs are enormous.

Regarding important sensitive internal policy issues that would have effect on our foreign policy, a decision-making forum comprising Presidential Advisers, top-level officials from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Defence, Internal Affairs, Justice, Economy and Finance, inter alia, should meet to discuss and access them with a view of defining a coherent policy. Officials from the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies and the National Institute for Advanced Legal Studies should be invited to give expert opinion on such issues in order to avoid the diplomatic blunders of our officials during the Ken Saro Wiwa crisis.

Nigeria should therefore precisely define in policy terms what its cultural policy is and what it aims to achieve outside the country. What does cultural cooperation with foreign countries imply? Does it simply mean encouraging foreign artists to organise tours in Nigeria or foreign countries to establish flourishing cultural and language centres in Lagos, Abuja and elsewhere in the country? Where in the world does Nigeria have a cultural centre worthy of its title? In the field of defence, what is our defence policy? Does it simply mean protecting the external and internal territorial integrity of the Nigeria? Protecting the integrity of the country against who? In short, who are our enemies and who are our friends? What type of relations should we have with all our French-speaking neighbouring countries considering that all of them have over thirty years old defence and military pacts with France, one of the world's leading military and industrial powers?

On Nigeria and its citizens abroad, what does the country intend to do to make them contribute in their own way to the economic, cultural, scientific and technological development of the country? In certain African countries, citizens residing abroad vote and take active part in political activities. What would Nigeria do to encourage its democracy to evolve toward such an objective? Nigerians living abroad should be encouraged to have closer relations with the motherland. Nigeria's foreign policy should include all these actors for a more global approach to policy issues than in the past.

Democratically elected regimes have a wider scope and more leeway in policy decisions than regimes resulting from military *coups d'états* because they are legitimate. In Nigeria's case, we have voluntarily or unconsciously restricted most vital foreign policy decisions or diplomatic initiatives to the African continent since we do not seem capable of going beyond Africa. We should no longer be satisfied with our fictional "giant of Africa" image and watch other African diplomatic "giants" like South Africa and Egypt work hard to get a name and maintain their place within the international arena.

## FOREIGN POLICY OBJECTIVES

The scope of Nigeria's foreign policy should no longer be limited to continental affairs. Its should be focused world-wide and geared toward the promotion of our cultural heritage, and scientific, economic and technical cooperation with viable partners. Its goal should aim at enhancing our national development, and military arrangements with NATO countries in order to give peace a permanent character in our societal needs and our sub-region. Finally, Nigerian



foreign policy should aim at creating benefits for the betterment of the people. It should no longer focus on Africa without clearly defined policy objectives.

Such a policy shift would mean a very careful choice of external actors. Although I would not advocate dropping Africa, Nigeria needs to make a careful choice of our closest allies based not on the wealth or technological advancement of the partner but on Nigeria's vital national interests in the cultural, economic, political, scientific and technical areas as well as in the military field. A commission comprising diplomats, top-level military officers, university professors and politicians should be set-up to review our foreign policy objectives and to redefine our vital national interests. Its mandate should be short and precise. These interests should be made the fundamental guidelines of all our foreign policy objectives in Africa, the European Union, America - both North and South, Asia and the Pacific. Nigeria's foreign policy objectives should henceforth focus on the benefits of such policy for its people. President Obasanjo's task would be to make the ordinary Nigerian feel the positive effects of the government on his or her life.

At another level, Nigeria's foreign policy should encompass a clear opinion and strategy on major international issues such as the reform of the United Nations, bilateral relations between Nigeria and members of the European Union outside the ACP-EU framework, discussions with the dynamic Asian economies on how best to boost their investment in Nigeria, how to make G7 governments encourage more foreign capital flows to the vital areas of our economy through a liberal foreign investment policy. Lastly, as a representative of Africa at large, Nigeria should campaign strongly to get admitted as a permanent member of the Security Council. These achievements would make the ordinary Nigerian realise the usefulness of the country's foreign policy in real, not abstract terms.

## Notes

1. The Guardian, 29/8/99, (See <http://www.nguardiannews.com/editorial/en/59501.htm>).
2. On comments relating to the attitude of Nigeria's authorities, see Bolaji Ogunseye – &laquo; In defence of career diplomats; The Guardian. 6th September 1999.
3. P.M. News, Lagos, 25th August 1999, (See <http://www.africanews.org/west/nigeria/stories>).
4. See THISDAY, The Sunday Newspaper, August 8, 1999, p. 10, I will surprise my critics – Lamido.
5. See Pierre Poret, "Liberalising capital flows : Lessons from Asia," The OECD Observer, October/November 1998, pp. 39-40.
6. See Vanguard – August 18, 1999.

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## BOOK REVIEWS

**The Anthropology of Anger: Civil Society and Democracy in Africa. Celestin Monga. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998. pp. 218, paper \$19.95.**

Celestin Monga's *The Anthropology of Anger* articulates an alternative to the study of democratization in Africa. He finds the paradigmatic approaches to African politics inadequate and often demeaning to Africans. Since, according to Monga, Western academics and governments alike do not take Africa seriously, he intends to elevate the discourse on Africa in order to repair the damage done by cavalier and ethnocentric studies of Africa. He proposes to accomplish this task through "a political anthropology of anger," which incorporates what he variously calls the "grassroots perspective," "everyday-life approach," and "everyday-language approach". The anthropology of anger -- a putatively intellectual response to situations that produce anger -- is intended to supplement a more conventional approach to understanding politics as involving "political markets."

One fails to see what is fresh and original about such an approach. The concept of political markets, like that of laissez-faire capitalism, is based on a view of society as consisting of egoistic individuals pursuing purely selfish interests. Although there is no lack of egoism among Africans, the concept of political markets scarcely fits societies still characterized by mutual aid, still under the sway of tradition (by Monga's own admission), and whose solidary relations remain largely intact (p. 153). It therefore seems odd that Monga, who blames some of Africa's most intractable problems on the reluctance of Africans to modernize and enter history (Chapter 3), would promote the concept of political markets as part of a methodology for understanding African politics.

*The Anthropology of Anger* also suffers from a glaring lack of complete and systematic argumentation, and some of Monga's critical terms are poorly defined. At various points, it seems as if he is finally going to demonstrate how his "everyday-life" approach works, but he falters, moving on to once more merely argue the merits of the approach (p. 110). Similarly, he continually refers to the concept of "indiscipline" without explicating it, let alone demonstrating its practical relevance. He defines civil society to mean society as a whole. Moreover, we are not sure whether democracy is merely a system of government that disperses power and maximizes governmental accountability, or "a quest for greater public welfare" (p. 70). Equally, we are not sure whether he believes Africa is modern when he declares "... those in charge of what passed for cultural politics in Africa missed the arrival of modernity" or questions whether outmoded ways are hampering modernization (p. 90). Monga does not explicate "modernity" and "modernization" in ways that would strengthen his argument.

This work also relies too heavily on secondary sources. The only evidence of primary research consists of a small number of interviews with musicians. The connection between the

<http://www.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v3/v3i3reviews.pdf>

aims of the book and the views of the artistshowever, is nebulous. The few examples of interpretations of everyday language also have no discernible connection to the author's proposed aim. He discusses the plight of youth in Africa and their supposed proclivity to violence. Yet apart from general statements about youth joblessness, he offers no concrete instances of the plight of youth in even one country to enable us to properly assess his claim. Throughout the book one notices Monga's overwhelming tendency to generalize about Africa. We have the inexcusable statement, "In an Africa where cable stations like CNN are watched in every home..." (p. 28). We also come across the claim, "... only a tiny minority of Africans can read the language they speak fluently" (p. 74), a claim Southern Africans in particular will find hard to accept.

Monga's book is engaging for its brilliant prose. It fails, however, to provide a satisfactory alternative to understanding political development in Africa. Monga dulls discourse by treating arguments outside his philosophical frame as motivated by a posture of cultural superiority. Carol Lancaster, for instance, is supposedly contemptuous of African voters because she does not think they behave like citizens in modern democracies. Instead, she argues that African democracy is bound to be different from Western democracy (p. 36). Rather than the Western intellectuals whom he cites as culprits of African denigration, it is seemingly Monga who disparages African society in a most regrettable manner. Taking a stance outside the narrative of the multitudes and ensconcing himself among "those who do not feel any allegiance to the habits and customs of their ancestors," Monga calls African peoples "social misfits" and "marginalized players in the construction of history" (p. 90). Although a central theme of the book seems to be the liberation of Africans (defined as the ending of the dictatorship of the group and the promotion of individualism), Monga displays an unusually intense interest in canvassing foreign intervention in African affairs.

Monga's version of dialectical materialism has much to do with his misdirection. This approach declares that the dialectic outcomes must come to pass, regardless of what the people actually think. The concept of progress, a process that he identifies with thorough-going modernization, governs Monga's enterprise as a dialectician. His method leads to apoplectic generalizations of African political scenes as consisting of villains (the rulers) and victims (the people).

Monga's anger is directed mostly at what he perceives as African injustice, and at outsiders who refuse to acknowledge that Africa's peoples are capable of embracing modernity. Although we may understand and even share Monga's anger at the injustice perpetrated by some of Africa's rulers, we should insist that anger is a poor substitute for proper research and argumentation.

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**Ethnic Conflicts in Africa.** Okwudiba Nnoli, ed. Nottingham: CODESRIA. Distributed by African Books Collective, 1998. pp. 417. paper: \$30.00

Images of Albanians and Serbs ravaged by ethnic conflicts have been blasted all over the western news media, but the fratricide occurring on the African continent draws little attention. This is due to, inter alia, what has seemingly become a universal belief: ethnic conflicts in Africa are an everyday occurrence. Undergirding this belief is the idea that Africans are enraged beings who murder one another ebulliently and are, therefore, undeserving of extensive media coverage. *Ethnic Conflicts in Africa* debunks this mythology through the documentation of multidimensional origins and contingent resolutions of ethnic conflicts in some African countries.

In the first chapter, the editor provides an overview and analysis of the book that seeks to provide answers to the following questions. Why is ethnic identity conducive to severe conflict? If and why ethnic conflict in Africa is more severe than in Europe and North America? What are the goals of ethnic conflicts? What are the causes, dynamics, and consequences of ethnic conflict? Who benefits from ethnic conflicts; and why? Responding to the aforesaid questions in ten to thirty pages seems like a nearly insurmountable task. The authors, however, manage to address these questions and how they apply to Nigeria, Burundi, Rwanda, Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Morocco, Mauritania, Senegal, Kenya, Tanzania, Zaire, Zimbabwe and Benin. Each author adheres to the structure of tracing the origins of ethnic conflicts from the pre-colonial, colonial to post-independence eras. This provides a reader with a sense of the beginnings of ethnic antagonism, the impact of colonialism on inter-ethnic relations, and how independent nations have handled such conflicts.

As to why ethnic conflict is more severe in Africa than other parts of the world, the authors provide various explanations, including the fact that colonial incursions exploited and compounded inter-ethnic inimicable relations. For example, in countries like Nigeria, Burundi, Rwanda, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Mauritania, Kenya, Tanzania, Zaire, and Zimbabwe, colonial powers utilized the segmentation of ethnic groups to their advantage. The divide-and-rule policies of colonial administrators assured the docility of different ethnic groups and thus shielded them from the menace of insurrection. In other words, it was feasible to divide ethnic groups and pit them against each other so that they could focus their energies on fighting one another rather than overthrowing colonial governments. This was also the strategy utilized by the apartheid regime in South Africa. In the case of Burundi and Rwanda, the authors posit that the promulgation of the hamitic mythology has been the source for recent pogroms in the two countries. However, as Mustapha informs us, the totality of the colonial experience is not reducible to just segmentation. For colonialism contained within it many cross-cutting contradictions, even at the level of identity formation and inter-ethnic relations" (p. 38).

As author after author points out, the corrosive, hierarchical, and divisive nature of capitalism is also responsible for the severity of ethnic conflict in Africa. As people perceive other groups to be more economically secure, they often turn to ethnicity as an anchor, particularly if those who are economically better off belong to a different ethnic group. This is not mere jealousy, but a need for every person to be economically secure, exacerbated by the inability or refusal of those who possess wealth to equally distribute resources. Whether it is the

peasants in rural Nigeria, the impoverished "indigenous" people of Liberia, or blacks in Mauritania, they are all pushed into conflict by socio-economic needs.

As to the beneficiaries of such conflicts, the authors concur that prior to independence, the colonialists were the most obvious. In post-colonial Africa as well such conflict does not benefit anyone but elites and those in power. For example, in Liberia, the members of the ruling group and other elites benefitted from the antagonistic relations of African-Liberians and Americo-Liberians. Osaghae's analysis is worth quoting: "Underneath conflicts which are apparently ethnic are personal (and class) ambitions which are desperate, opportunistic and violence prone. This is an indictment of the elite Americo-Liberians and African-Liberians whose rapaciousness is responsible for the deterioration of relations among ethnic groups" (p. 156). In Benin, the Batombous had access to positions from which other groups were barred. Hence, those at the center of the society benefit at the expense of the marginalized, as is the case in many western countries.

The authors in this book argue that ethnic conflicts in Africa are rooted in various socio-economic and political factors rather than Africans' exigency to engage in blood letting. Ethnic groups are often compelled to fratricide by legitimate issues. The authors, however, point out that this documentation of the causes does not make ethnic conflict inevitable and thus ineradicable. As Sithole states, "The problems of social engineering are more like algebra and calculus than simple arithmetic. It is not a matter of taking an equal number from each ethnic group [into leadership positions]. It is who amongst the ethnics are added that achieves the balance. Are they to be perceived to be representative leaders by the particular community? What positions are they given relative to others" (p. 377)?

This book is well researched and written. It will be invaluable to beginning and advanced scholars of political science and history. Students of policy development will also find this book quite useful. I highly recommend it. My main criticism is the editor's postulation that ethnic divisions were not always a source of conflict and were even a conduit for solidarity during colonial rule in Africa. However, with the exception of Zimbabwe, the authors maintain that ethnic divisions were never a positive factor during colonial times. This discrepancy between the editor's introduction and the rest of the book is rather unsettling. Aside from this, the book is a great contribution to our understanding of ethnic conflicts in Africa, providing important lessons for the new democracy of South Africa about the need for socio-economic stability for all people, as well as recognizing the danger of the oppressor within all of us.

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**Labor and Democracy in Namibia, 1971-1996. Gretchen Bauer. Athens: Ohio University Press, 1998. pp. 229 . Cloth: \$34.95; Paper: \$17.95.**

The literature on democratic transitions occurring in many African countries has recently moved from comprehensive studies of the transition process (i.e., elections, national



conferences, constitutions, etc.) to detailed case studies of democratic survival. A secondary focus has been on the role civil society can play in the democratization process, particularly in democratic consolidation. *Labor and Democracy in Namibia, 1971-1996*, both analytical and documentary in style, provides a critical case study for this growing body of literature by examining the involvement of labor movements in the struggle for democracy in Namibia.

Bauer draws on materials not widely available before independence in 1990 and on interviews with political leaders, community activists, trade unionists, and employers. She has two aims. The first is to provide a current description as well as trace the historical origins and development of unions, the central labor movement, and industrial relations in Namibia. Within this frame of reference, the author examines various influences on the labor movement, relations between unions and employees, attitudes of employees and employers toward unionism, the role of the state, and the political and industrial strategies of the unions. In particular, the author examines the industrial strike of 1970-1971, which was to ultimately shape industrial relations in Namibia.

The second aim of the book is to describe how the labor movement in Namibia can generate strong, autonomous, organizations which then play a major role in building and safeguarding democracy in Namibia. However, in the first years of independence, labor appears to be in a weakened and precarious position, thus diminishing the prospects for the successful consolidation of democracy in Namibia. The reasons for this weakness lie in the skewed nature of the economy and the legacy of labor policies produced by oppressive colonial and apartheid regimes. This weakness is also attributed to the close affiliation of the major trade union federation in Namibia, the National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW), with the nationalist political party South West Africa Peoples Organization (SWAPO).

Not everyone will agree with Bauer's arguments and conclusions, particularly members of the central labor movement. The book suggests that they decided to subordinate the unions to the nationalist struggle and postpone development efforts until after independence. A more detailed analysis of how this issue affected consolidation efforts would help clarify a potentially controversial conclusion. Although democracy and democratic consolidation features in the title, the book includes little discussion on democratic consolidation at the conceptual level. For example, what factors assist or impede democratic transition? Near the beginning of this book, Bauer asserts that Namibia has brighter prospects for the consolidation of democracy than any other country in Africa. There is no reasoned account to this optimism. In specific terms, what will it take to consolidate Namibia's nascent democracy? Perhaps, with these and related issues more fully addressed, Bauer's conclusions on the role of labor in Namibia would appear less controversial.

This work should be manifestly situated within the labor relations literature, and latently situated within the democratic discourse. Except for the last chapter and a brief highlight in the introductory chapter, the book is a complete documentary analysis of labor, employer, SWAPO, and state relations in the colonial period and early years of independence. Very little attention is given to the political vanguard role that labor unions often play in the democratization process. Rather, this book shows how labor unions in Namibia have used their relative power (through strikes and violence) to play a traditional role (to improve the terms and conditions of employment). The author points to this as part of the overall strategy for national liberation.



This book is very well written and organized, but its greatest strength lies in demonstrating the value of interviews and the participant observation method for social research. This is especially true for Africa, where most scholars on democracy churn out quantitatively informed books. The findings of these studies are, in many cases, at variance with the reality on the ground. The interviews employed by Bauer provide for a more balanced account and analysis. Students (graduate and undergraduate), teachers, labor leaders, and general interest readers seeking a clear discussion on the role of labor movements in Africa will find this work useful and beneficial.

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**When Hens Begin to Crow: Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda. Sylvia Tamale. Boulder: Westview Press, 1999. pp. 272. Cloth: \$ 65.00.**

The intriguing title of Sylvia Tamale's study, *When Hens Begin To Crow*, sets the pace for this rich and fascinating study of gender and politics in Uganda. "*Wali owulide ensera ekokolima?*" ["Have you ever heard a hen crow?"] as Tamale explains, was shouted at a woman candidate during the 1996 Ugandan general elections. "Female chickens do not normally crow. At least popular mythology claims that they cannot. Hence, in many African cultures, a crowing hen is considered an omen of bad tidings that must be expiated through the immediate slaughter of the offending bird...The message was clear: Women have no business standing for political office" (p. 1).

In spite of a historical tradition of political marginalization, women across Africa are increasingly taking their place in the public arena of politics. Whereas in western society, affirmative action for women is more commonly found in education and employment, in Africa positive acts to end historical and systemic discrimination against women have focused largely on constitutional provisions and legislative actions to ensure representation by women in national and/or local political bodies<sup>1</sup>. Uganda provides excellent material for a case study on the (re-) emergence of African women's political voice. Uganda has had some notable successes: designated parliamentary seats for women from each of the districts<sup>2</sup> (1995 Constitution); a national machinery for gender (1988)<sup>3</sup>, and a National Gender Policy (1997); one-third women members in Local Council executives (Local Governments Act, 1997); and the first woman vice-president in Africa, Dr. Speciosa Wandire Kazibwe.

The significant contribution of women in the National Resistance Movement (NRM) bush war, the formation and activism of women's NGOs following the 1985 Nairobi UN Conference on Women, and the coalition of women, youth, and disabled delegates during the 1994 Constituent Assembly ensured that the affirmative action policies of the NRM of President Yoweri Museveni (1986) continued under the new constitution. Tamale's study focuses on the beneficiaries of affirmative action, documenting both the successes of and challenges to women parliamentarians in Uganda.

Culture remains the largest obstacle to equitable treatment of women, whether they are politicians or rural agriculturalists. As Tamale states, "... policies such as affirmative action provide the space for women's entry into politics and a potential for change. But the contradictions of implementing such policies under existing patriarchal structures ... [means that]... hens may begin crowing but they will continue to lay and hatch from eggs (the old patriarchal order)" (p. 26). Female parliamentarians are subjected to sexual harassment from their colleagues, ridicule in parliamentary debates and the media, the burden of double and triple duty, and the reminder that for most of them their presence in parliament is tokenism.

Although elected as women members of parliament (MP), once in the House they are admonished that they do not represent women *per se*, but must represent both men and women. Yet they are only heard (and largely ignored) when they debate women's issues. A case in point is the recent passing of the Land Act (1998). MP Miria Matembe lobbied for and succeeded in passing an amendment to include provision for co-ownership by women of the matrimonial residence (a major accomplishment, as women customarily do not own or have rights to land). The Land Act was promulgated, but the amendment was omitted! Likewise, patriarchal opposition to the reform of the Domestic Relations Bill (largely in relation to polygamy) has stalled the passage of that bill through Parliament. In spite of the successes of women in Uganda, tradition dies hard.

Whether the presence of women in politics in Uganda is at the pleasure of the NRM or sustainable in the long run is still open to debate. It is interesting to note that Winnie Byanyima (a participant in the bush war and MP in an open seat), although expelled from the Movement Secretariat for openly criticising the Movement on the issue of corruption, is still one of the most widely respected politicians in Uganda. Some have even suggested that she run for president in 2002.

Tamale uses qualitative methods: intensive interviews of 40 female and 15 male legislators<sup>4</sup>; observation of parliamentary debates, committee meetings, and workshops specifically organized for women parliamentarians; interviews with leaders of prominent women's NGOs and grassroots rural women; and a constituency visit alongside Byanyima. Tamale has also extensively mined documentary sources such as Hansard (colonial and post-colonial), Constituent Assembly proceedings, media reports and a wide range of secondary literature. Tamale scrutinizes her material in an analysis that is grounded in the "dialectical relationship between gender, class, ethnicity, religion, imperialism and neocolonialism [that] is especially pertinent for an analysis of gender relations in the African context" (p. 3). Both for newcomers and those who are gender specialists, her introduction and the interweaving in subsequent chapters of the themes developed provide a comprehensive overview in accessible language of gender issues, as well as thoughtful insights and new directions for political analysis on Africa and elsewhere. Those interested in African politics, women's movements, gender relations, or socio-political history will find that Tamale's work provides a wealth of information and analysis.

## Notes

1. Affirmative action constitutions or legislation in countries such as Uganda, Ghana, Tanzania, Burkina Faso, Eritrea, Sudan, Egypt, Algeria, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia,

Mauritius, Namibia, Rwanda, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe have resulted in some instances of a greater percentage of women representatives than in many "first world" countries.

2. Thirty-nine in 1995, increased to 46 with district reorganization. Women, of course, can and have been elected to Parliament in openly contested seats. There are also mandatory seats for Youth and Disabled under the Constitution.
3. The National Resistance Council established the Ministry of Women in Development in 1988. This became the Ministry of Women in Development, Youth and Culture in 1995 and is currently the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development.
4. Interviewees were selected to ensure balance "through geographical region, political inclination, socioeconomic background, age, religion and political experience" (p. 206).

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**Aid to Africa: So Much to Do, So Little Done. Carol Lancaster. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999. pp. 272. Cloth: \$ 55.00, Paper: \$22.00.**

In a time when Overseas Development Aid (ODA) is under threat throughout the industrialized west, Carol Lancaster's *Aid to Africa* contributes a measure of reason and empiricism to a debate that is otherwise driven by competing commercial, ideological and political interests. With this book, Lancaster, a former deputy administrator of USAID, addresses "why, with so much aid, has there been so little development in sub-Saharan Africa?" Her effort includes both an explanation for past failures and suggestions meant to improve future performance. Using a wealth of economic indicators, her response begins by comparing the achievements of six donor countries (the US, Britain, France, Japan, Sweden, and Italy) and two multilaterals (the World Bank and the European Union) whose contributions together account for 60 percent of the "concessional" aid to sub-Saharan Africa.

Lancaster's generally negative assessment should not surprise even the undergraduate development studies audience for which this text is best suited. But the focus on aid agencies' political/institutional characteristics provides an unusual perspective with real payoffs for those not attuned to aid debates or organization theory/analysis as applied to development assistance. Through her country case studies, Lancaster concludes that it is not the general misallocation of aid, nor the ineptitude of African leaders and bureaucracies that bear primary responsibility for continued failures. Rather, political and bureaucratic interests combine with ineffective organizational structures and institutionalized dysfunctions to prevent donors from effectively evaluating, improving and coordinating their development initiatives. It is neither the level of aid nor the recipients that are to blame, but the way aid is delivered.

The author's assertion-that it is primarily the entrenched "bureaupathologies" of donors that lead to failure-can be taken to two logical conclusions. The first is Lancaster's: since the donors are at fault, western lobbyists can do something to ameliorate deplorable levels of waste

and corruption, and, in the process help eliminate poverty, illiteracy, and injustice. This is a refreshing position that self-consciously distances Lancaster from the fevered deconstructionist/hypercritical pitch adopted by many current students of development. This departure also affords her the freedom to put forth a set of concrete recommendations: that aid agencies be given more autonomy from political pressures (as in the British model); that they be encouraged to coordinate to avoid working at cross-purposes; and that standardized measures for gauging success be developed and employed. All of this, Lancaster argues, will allow better evaluation of past efforts so that future campaigns will be more effective. While her case studies are well (albeit unevenly) substantiated, in making such recommendations Lancaster breaks from the logic of her analysis. Although she has definitely contributed to an understanding of the problems associated with ODA to Africa, her attempt to procure a solution is itself problematic.

Considering her second conclusion brings the pitfalls of Lancaster's analysis into relief. This position holds that because the environment (politicians, other government and non-governmental actors, and agency staff) is responsible for aid agencies' pathologies, there is little latitude for improvement. As Lancaster's own analysis suggests, donor agencies are embedded within an intrinsically political system encompassing deep-seated forces unlikely to be dislodged by something as un compelling as "aid to Africa". The hard-liners of this camp, many already wishing to cut ODA, will publicly conclude that aid must cease and desist all together. On the other hand, those content merely to reduce and reform the system will seize quickly on Lancaster's suggestion that aid be dedicated entirely to "effective" programs. However, the demand for "effectiveness" will likely direct funds only to those areas in which progress is easily quantified. Not only will this eliminate support for many "softer" social programs, but the poorest of the poor-the ostensible targets of ODA-are likely to be excluded all together. Rather than fruitless spending on the deeply impoverished, experience suggests that those on the upper margins of poverty will be offered just enough so that a given initiative might be considered a success. One can take an example from within the text itself. Lancaster suggests that US aid to South African civic groups during the 1980s and early 1990s counts as a rare American success. While such assistance may indeed have helped expand the diversity and impact of these organizations, arguing that it is responsible for an already burgeoning civil society is something of a fancy, as shown by Robert Price in his 1991 book, *The Apartheid State in Crisis*. Even with this plethora of groups, post-apartheid South Africa must still provide social services to its impoverished, many of whom remain unrepresented by these civic organizations.

It is unfortunate that Lancaster detracts from her valuable and generally insightful organizational analysis with a set of untenable and potentially delusional recommendations. The review of the terminology and major themes of development discourse provides a welcome entrance into the theory of economic and political development. Her comparative analysis, influenced by work in economics, political science and public management, introduces an analytical dimension many development economists and consultants would be wise to heed. Perhaps the greatest irony of this book is that while suggesting that politics and organizational pathologies are the problem, Lancaster then ignores these realities in proffering her solutions.

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**Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace - Or War. Mary Anderson. Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999. pp. 147. Cloth: \$35.00; Paper: \$16.95.**

In *Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace-or War*, Mary Anderson invokes the time-honored words from the Hippocratic oath that calls upon medical doctors to put the interests of their patients first. The book's primary goal is to "challenge aid agency staff members to take responsibility for the way their assistance affects conflicts" (p.161). Anderson encourages aid staff to applaud themselves where aid has affected a conflict situation positively. The challenge is to step back and look more closely at the conflict situation that they are operating in and seek lessons from past actions by other aid agencies to try and decrease the negative impact of aid. She is quick to point out that she is often accused of a "rosy optimism" (p.vii), but accepts this verdict because, even in the most atrocious war conditions, she has borne witness to the greatness of the human spirit. The book's target audience includes aid agency staff and the wider international development community.

The book is an easy read, divided into three sections. The first section covers war in general and the impact of external aid viewed through the lens of relative resource transfers, as well as the implicit ethical messages that often come with aid. It also offers an analytical framework for mapping a particular conflict setting in which one is administering aid. The framework walks the participant through a series of questions that seek to identify the "connectors" or "local capacities for peace" that bring cohesion in a society as well as "tension" or "dividers" that have the capacity to push a society into conflict or keep a society in conflict. The second section covers five case studies in Tajikistan, Lebanon, Burundi, India and Somalia. Here, she seeks to bring out the positive actions by aid agency staff in catalyzing peace initiatives, as well as actions by the communities in which conflict was rife, that showed a capacity to seek an end to the conflict. The third section is a short summary of the main lessons learned from the theoretical framework presented in the first section and case studies.

Anderson satisfies the continued need among NGO staff to step back and look at the impact of the aid they are administering. NGOs have been under attack for over a decade concerning the negative impact of aid policies and implementation plans. Most of these diatribes have been scathing. Anderson attempts to center the debate by pointing to examples of the positive effects of aid while analyzing the negative aspects in those very same cases. This is a difficult endeavor. The first section attempts to categorize the reasons why wars are fought and what shapes responses among communities to pursue or not to pursue war. As with all categorization, the beauty of it is in the eyes of the beholder.

Although the text in the first section makes a good effort to describe how one would carry out an analysis of an intensely complex emergency, the analytical tool seems too simplistic and bare. Furthermore, the case studies omit four important prolonged conflicts that would have shed more light on any lessons learned: the former Yugoslavia, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict,



the war in Northern Ireland, and the Sudan conflict. For the five cases presented, however, she provides a solid background summary of the political economy of the conflicts. This is achieved without turning this section into a dense history text. Each of these case studies represents a different phase of a complex emergency. How the model determines the specific phase of a conflict was not immediately clear.

The final section could have presented the lessons learned in a much more comprehensive manner. One needs to come away with a clear summary of how aid can "do no harm"-when an adequate analysis of the conflict is carried out in a dynamic fashion, when "local capacities for peace" are identified and nurtured throughout the various phases of conflict, when "tensions" and "dividers" are identified and diffused as best one can as aid is distributed. Instead, this section seems hastily put together, leaving the reader to summarize any lessons learned from the text.

Two important caveats to the conclusion section need further analysis and study. The book is unable to show how micro-level support for local peace capacities can be linked to the macro-level efforts or hindrances often occurring simultaneously. All NGOs grapple with this in their programming, advocacy and outreach efforts. None has found a suitable answer to how to do this best, but in this Information Age, the answer might be around the corner in the recipient communities as they increasingly access information and an education. The second caveat concerns the role of "outsiders" who comprise the majority of NGO staff. Anderson fails to mention a changing trend, as NGOs are increasingly staffed by "insiders" who struggle to maintain objectivity and provide an appropriate lens to the conflict setting, ensuring that programming achieves its overall aim to "do no harm."

Anderson's book reads well. It is not geared for a heavily academic audience. The bibliographic essay is sparse, but gives enough leads for a more rigorous examination of peacebuilding. NGO staff members are encouraged to put some of their scarce time for learning aside to read this book, provide the fodder for future learning and advocacy, and ensure that aid does indeed support peace, not war.

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**Land, Ecology, and Resistance in Kenya, 1880-1952. Fiona D.A. Mackenzie. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1998. pp. 286, paper \$26.00.**

On 14 April 1948, the "Revolt of the Women" occurred in Muranga District of Kenya's Central Province. Twenty-five hundred women marched upon the District headquarters with "Amazonian war cries" to protest against the use of coerced labor for state soil conservation measures. Although wider peasant unrest occurred in Muranga between 1947-1948, this event was significant due to the gender and class issues raised. As such, it provides the backdrop for Fiona Mackenzie's work, *Land, Ecology and Resistance in Kenya, 1880-1952*. Mackenzie examines the dialectic of ecological improvement within the reserves in Kenya and the subsequent social



impact upon African communities. Her specific purpose is to examine the antagonisms of class and gender which arose as aspects of this discourse of ecological improvement.

In the 1930s and 1940s, environmental degradation became a major preoccupation of the colonial state in Kenya. As one result, soil conservation campaigns broadened in scope. These campaigns became part of the overall intensification of an administrative presence in the reserves. For Mackenzie, these campaigns also served as a subterfuge for an underlying discourse of control. The rhetoric of ecological improvement served as a veil for settler apprehension concerning land tenure. Settler concerns for the spread of diseases and soil degradation associated with African farming methods disguised fears for their holdings in the White Highlands. Consequently, environmentalism became a weapon to legitimize settler land tenure (associated with right farming practices and correct land use) and reinforce state support for settler agriculture. The campaigns of the 1930s and 1940s also recast the political crisis over land as a technological problem that privileged Western agricultural practices while portraying indigenous agricultural practices as unscientific (p. 9). Since much knowledge about agriculture in Africa was the purview of women, such privileging of Western knowledge entailed the silencing of female voices.

The campaigns of ecological "betterment" reduced the status of women as the main cultivators of the land and keepers of agricultural knowledge. These programs were implemented in an atmosphere of increasing land scarcity within Central Province. As a result, the British attempted to define customary land law more clearly, with an eye toward formulating policy. These attempts resulted in a fluid and dynamic system becoming rigid and static. The net effect was a system of customary law that weakened the position of women and the poor against that of the rich peasants or "Big Men" (p.17).

Mackenzie's work is divided into seven chapters and uses extensive archival sources, mainly Colonial Office records, in addition to European travelers' accounts and oral evidence. The first three chapters examine the role of women in pre-colonial Muranga as the primary agricultural cultivators and how this role changed when the British began to redefine customary law. Pre-colonial rights to land were dynamic and complex, leaving space for the negotiation of women's rights to land. The reassessment of the customary land laws served to effectively suppress women's rights to land. Although women previously could technically not own land, their rights to land were secured through recognition of their value as cultivators (p. 24).

Mackenzie states there were latent tensions within this customary land system. The fluidity of customary land law masked tensions that would later surface more acutely. These underlying tensions between the Mbari (subclan) and the individual or between women and men would become much more problematic as land became scarce under colonialism. British attempts to define customary land law exacerbated the tensions underlying the customary land system. For example, since the Mbari controlled rights of allocation of land, heightened social differentiation and increasing land sales threatened the solidarity of the sub-clan. Mackenzie points out that in Kiambu, this had been the case. Due to the impact of long distance trade on the southern part of Kikuyuland during the nineteenth century, the solidarity of the Mbari had given way to increasing individualization by the time of British conquest. In Muranga, on the other hand, Mbari power over land allocation remained strong due to the lesser impact of long distance trade.

These attempts took place through an assortment of commissions and inquiries. Mackenzie's analysis examines The Committee on Native Land Tenure in Kikuyu Province in 1929 and the Kenya Land Commission of 1932-1934. As evidenced in Kiambu and Muranga, these commissions encountered class and gender issues reflecting contradictory views of customary land law. In Kiambu, where the process of individualization had been more acute, witnesses reconstructed a version of customary land law which reinforced the idea of individual land sales. This served to protect the rights of accumulators who were amassing land and wealth. In contrast, many Muranga witnesses reconstructed a version of customary land law which stressed the power of the Mbari over land allocation. In both Muranga and Kiambu, the evidence laid before the commissions did not diverge regarding women's rights to land: it uniformly stressed rights of allocation over rights of use. Since women derived many of their rights to land through their power over usufruct, the stress upon allocation rights over use rights weakened women's negotiating power (p. 90).

The second half of the book discusses the impact ecological improvement campaigns upon the resource base and women's agricultural knowledge. According to Mackenzie, concern over environmental degradation belied an ulterior motive. By the end of the 1930s, European settlers feared the African success with maize production. The colonial administration was becoming alarmed at the rapid growth of African accumulators (p. 142). The solution was to blame it on the Africans. The problem of land degradation became a problem of African farming methods. As a result, the ecological improvement campaigns articulated methods involving Western knowledge or techniques. State programs relied upon engineering as opposed to biological/agronomical methods in controlling soil degradation. To combat soil erosion, the state recommended time and space consuming methods such as terracing. However, the use of terracing often proved problematic. Since terraces pulled much land out of cultivation, many African farmers preferred biological methods, such as contour hedges and mixed farming to control land degradation.

The suppression of indigenous knowledge also occurred in the effort to increase agricultural productivity within the reserves. To stimulate maize production, the Department of Agriculture began a massive seeding campaign, which involved dispersing seeds bred for high yield, marketability, and varietal uniformity. The environmental effect of these campaigns of "betterment" in the reserves was twofold. Ecologically, the seeding campaign resulted in a high yield maize crop but one which lacked genetic diversity and resistance to pests, disease and drought. The promotion of maize also resulted in the decline of millet production, a more nutritious and drought-resistant crop. The state also advocated the use of monocropping methods, as opposed to the indigenous inter-cropping methods. The emphasis on maize production demanded a heavy reliance upon imported agricultural knowledge, undercutting women's authority since they were the main purveyors of indigenous agricultural knowledge. As Mackenzie states "...the negotiation of gender relations of production was linked to the politics of knowledge production (p. 202).

The discourse of ecological improvement in Kenya had already been covered by scholars such as David Throup. But Mackenzie uniquely adds to the scholarship on this subject by projecting women's voices. Mackenzie attempts to write history "from below" by discussing the role of women in the discourse of environmentalism. She does not bring gender into the picture so much as cast light upon a dark recess which has been ignored by previous scholarship on the

subject. However, on this point I also find fault with Mackenzie's analysis. In her re-enactment of pre-colonial customary land law, Mackenzie relies almost singlehandedly upon Jean Fisher's *Anatomy of Kikuyu Domesticity and Husbandry* (1954) to reconstruct the role of use rights in giving women more power of negotiation against the patriarchal structure. Moreover, most of her oral evidence comes from female informants without any counter point from male informants. The danger here is the problem of creating herstory, whatever it may be. However, this work is needed and students of Kenya's history will find it a worthy contribution.

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**The Moral Economy of the State: Conservation, Community Development and State Making in Zimbabwe.** William A Munro. Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies Publications, 1998. pp. 461. Paper: \$26.00.

*The Moral Economy of the State* examines the political economy of state-formation and nation-building in colonial and post-independence Zimbabwe. The book chronicles the historical process by which Zimbabweans developed an intense desire for social, political, economic, and cultural transformation. The book also examines the colonial state's attempts at state-formation and the transformation of Zimbabwe from post-independence visions to a modern industrial society.

Munro begins his treatise with a firm and thorough survey of the Zimbabwean socioeconomic and cultural literature. His study presents processes rather than structures to explain the genesis and entrenchment of constraints on contemporary state-formation. In so doing, he explores the processes shaping institutional and organizational change in rural Zimbabwe amidst growing demands made by the state. This exposes the contradictions often found in state-countryside relations in Zimbabwe. The state has encouraged rural communities to take on responsibilities which it cannot manage or will not undertake.

The author initially "sets out to resolve the tension between structure and process in state-society relations by focusing on state practice--i.e., the actions of state agents but also the political and ideological logics that drive their actions and make them intelligible" (p. 3). He then traces the political effects of contradictions in development processes, examining institutions as a powerful force in the reproduction of colonial discourse about land distribution and use in rural Zimbabwe. Debates between differing factions of white settlers about the postwar expansion of land reforms and appropriations reflected the colonial state's spiraling crisis of social control (p. 140). The government embarked on a new hegemonic project, one based on a thorough reassessment of state structures and their relationship to society (p. 141). The author also lays out the historical paradox of state authority. Here, Munro canvasses a number of specific state-formation and nation-building campaigns intended to legitimize the state by forging connections between pre-and post-independence Zimbabwe.

Munro examines the powerful legacy of state intervention in peasant patterns of land tenure and use, as all facets of land management became issues of potential state-peasant

contention (p. 233). He outlines the government's interest in land control and its articulation in technocratic terms. The author describes the ambiguities of rural land control in terms of the resettlement program, the "squatter problem," and the fluidity of rural politics. He analyzes the state's social institutions of common resource management as a route to rural empowerment.

Finally, Munro shows how institutions designed to widen the realm of local political interaction often failed to create a close link between technical interests, management, and governance. This analysis also offers considerable insight as to why state intervention continued to be a fragile initiative (p. 257). Community development was a state-directed attempt to combine market participation with self-reliance and limited proletarianization. It remained a precarious co-optive strategy, partly because of technocratic state traditions and interministerial insecurities reminiscent of the colonial era, but also as a result of the enduring adversarial quality of state-peasant relations (p. 223).

The book concludes that any study of state-formation in Zimbabwe must not casually dispense with the heterogeneity of Zimbabwean culture. State-formation and nation-building are beyond the capacity of any one institution, as has been evidenced by the historical failure of state intervention. State-formation in Zimbabwe has more than a little to do with a failure to develop communities. Munro's book manages to relate the conditions of early state intervention with the prospects of contemporary Zimbabwe and also those of other African states struggling with the process of state-formation. Perhaps the conclusion to be drawn from this book is that state power does not work by culturally dominating passive subordinate groups (mainly rural women and youth). Rather, that it works by forcibly organizing and dividing the elements of participatory democracy during state-formation.

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**The Pillage of Sustainability in Eritrea, 1600s -1990s: Rural Communities and the Creeping Shadows of Hegemony. Niaz Murtaza. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1998. pp. 224. cloth: \$59.95.**

In the relatively tranquil space opened up between Eritrea's liberation in 1991 and the igniting of war with Ethiopia in 1998, scholarly research on a range of issues has made a modest start. Niaz Murtaza's book is one product of this early period of research and, as such, exhibits both the promise as well as the limitations of pioneer work into a region that for too long remained off limits to scholars. The central argument of this study is that the recurrent threats of famine and environmental degradation afflicting the area are rooted in the long-term consequences of actions by hegemonic forces on traditional production systems. Such systems represented rational responses to the constraints of local environments. If not always highly productive, they allowed for the sustainability of rural communities.

Following a conventional periodization, Murtaza suggests that before Italian colonization in 1889, intermittent ethnic conflicts or attacks by various regional armies might have caused

large-scale destruction of life and property, but there was little interference in the production process per se. Italian colonization (1889 -1942), in the form of a modern and centralized power structure, represented a radical departure. Utilizing a greater technological capacity to extract resources, Italian power realigned the colonial economy to meet its own consumption patterns. This fundamentally altered the relationship of rural communities to both state and market. While pre-colonial forces exacted tribute or siphoned-off surplus from rural output, the colonial state engaged in directly expropriating the resources of traditional communities. Heightened regional immigration, intensified deforestation, and a more intrusive state (controlled by a social stratum not dependent on the output of traditional communities) significantly transformed local production systems. The subsequent Ethiopian period (1952-91) was characterized by a mixture of both the traditional and the new means of expropriation. The crisis of local systems precipitated by Italian colonial policies was further compounded by the Ethiopian state in its imperial war against the national liberation movements.

Murtaza conducted primary research in villages both in the highlands and lowlands. Using analytical variables such as empowerment, viability, adaptability, and vulnerability, he suggests that rural communities suffered a gradual erosion of their asset base (expressed as the quantity and quality of agricultural and grazing land, forests, and animal herds). A number of crucial organizational principles and community institutions were likewise undermined, including the "reciprocal relationship between the highlands and lowlands, the synergy between agriculture and animal herding, and the diversification provided by large animal herds." The scale of such changes indicated something more than a cyclical crisis. By the 1980s, many rural communities succumbed to a trend of diminishing resources caused by these long term disruptions.

Liberation in 1991 brought an end to the violence, but the damage done under Italian and Ethiopian rule left permanent scars. Animal herds were depleted, while soil erosion and deforestation left a denuded landscape. The government faces a shortage of resources. Aid from international donors is either inadequate or comes attached to recommendations that are potentially unfavorable to rural communities. Accordingly, Murtaza maintains that traditional production systems must be strengthened, with rural communities assigned a leadership role. By taking the indigenous capacities and perspectives of rural communities as the building blocks for designing programs, locally appropriate and cost-effective strategies can be devised to deal with these problems.

Only a few cursory remarks will be made for this wide-ranging book. For one thing, the concept of 'traditional' communities that Murtaza deploys as a baseline for his study is misleading, particularly for a region that was a component part of the vast Red Sea-Indian Ocean trading network for over two millennia. Consequently, there is a tendency to view these traditional communities as monolithic and thereby devoid of antagonistic social conflicts that have negatively impacted on their self-reproductive capacities. A relevant example in this regard is the struggle by the Tigre agro-pastoralists against the pastoral aristocracy. An analysis of this conflict, which came to a head in the 1940s, could have revealed the way in which local struggles are decisively influenced by regional and extra-regional actors. An unmediated and polarized view of viable indigenous communities fending off outside forces leaves many questions unanswered. Arguably, it is the ongoing dynamics of local communities, the possibilities for change, the manner in which local structures can be animated and empowered,



and the ways in which they are articulated with national or global hegemonic forces that constitute the most interesting and challenging fields of research.

Nonetheless, this is a clearly organized and valuable study that provides a good starting point for further inquiry. Murtaza's striving to identify the nexus between the policies of hegemonic actors and the downward trajectory of indigenous social systems is revealing. His contention that famine and poverty are consequences of policy rather than a dictate of nature is salutatory. The numerous graphs and statistical tables are instructive. Moreover, the book comes at an opportune time, serving as a clarion call not only against the horrifying war currently unfolding in the region, but also the long-term threat it poses to the viability of rural communities.

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**Quest for the Jade Sea: Colonial Competition around an East African Lake. Pascal James Imperato. Boulder: Westview Press, 1998. pp. 332. Cloth: \$35.00.**

The exploration of the Lake Rudolf (Turkana) area receives little attention in studies of colonialism. The wars between Ethiopia and Italy, Britain and the Mahdi State, and the competition between Britain, France and Belgium over Equatorial Sudan are usually cited as the determining factors of the colonial scramble of the region. Nevertheless, at the end of the nineteenth century Lake Rudolf was the subject of many expeditions which "reflected misguided colonial judgments about its economic and strategic importance and its presumed relationship to the Nile" (p. 2). In his chronological overview of this frenetic activity, Pascal Imperato draws a sharp distinction between expeditions that originated from geographical concerns (identifying the course of rivers, especially the Nile) and those with explicit political goals (claiming territory). He believes the first expeditions were oriented to science and sport, although their original impetus might have been political (e.g. the interest of Crown Prince Rudolf in the Teleki expedition, 1886-88). Only from 1896, in the enterprises of Bottego, Marchand, Bonchamps and Macdonald, does Imperato detect clear political aims. The subsequent 1899-1900 British expedition of Harrison and Whitehouse was the first to claim territory and draw borders. The book ends with a brief sketch of the actual demarcation expeditions and the more recent history of the region.

Imperato is far more confident when discussing the personal, logistic and geographical aspects of the expeditions than their political backgrounds. In the introduction he expresses his admiration for these "bold, resourceful, and unorthodox" adventurers (p. 6). His book is a straightforward and accessible account of these "glorious ventures." Although Imperato, is a doctor specializing in African tropical diseases, he acts here as an amateur historian at his best. He has researched a plethora of archives, sometimes in obscure places, and interviewed descendants of the explorers, which enables him to reveal many colourful details about such enterprising or eccentric men as Teleki, von Höhnel, Donaldson Smith, Bulatovich, Leontiev,



etc. His open perspective also saves him from ideological or theoretical blindness. He thus understands colonial competition as a complex, interrelated history. Enterprising men and indigenous powers played an important role next to colonial powers and underlying socio-economic forces. He gives due attention to the hesitant, sometimes indifferent position of the British government and the expansionist policies of Menelik as determining the political relevance of later expeditions to the Lake Rudolf region.

Imperato's approach, however, begs for a more systematic, critical analysis of political contexts and consequences of colonialist exploration. It is unsettling that the author wraps up his story at the moment of actual demarcation between Ethiopia and British East Africa. Imperato seems aware of more profound and long-term aspects (e.g., the changes in the demography and ecology of the area caused by the expeditions) but refrains from elaborating upon them. His introduction takes issue with recent, postmodern studies of nineteenth-century travel accounts that seek to uncover Eurocentric, imperialistic attitudes and appropriation of local knowledges. He warns against anachronistic judgments and concludes positively that these studies have allowed us to understand better the cultural and social references of the travellers. But in this book, there is very little trace of even this weakened version of a critical approach to colonialist exploration. The travel accounts are taken at face value, so that stories of "treacherous local traders," "deserting porters," and "hostile tribes" are uncritically rehearsed.

Imperato is more critical of the extensive and enthusiastic shooting of game, particularly of the expeditions led by Neumann (1895) and Cavendish (1897). Cavendish is also reproached for his harsh treatment of the Boran and Turkana, but this critique only stems from other accounts of that expedition. Imperato does not expand beyond his archives by incorporating indigenous oral histories of the region or by approaching the travel accounts in a discourse-analytic way. As for the one 'indigenous' side in this book, it is useful that Imperato does discuss Ethiopian expansionist politics and he treats Ethiopia as a major player alongside Britain and France. But the discussion is also somewhat rhetorically attenuating for colonialism in general. There is a blatant imbalance between the recurrent emphasis on the atrocities committed by the Ethiopian expeditions and the largely uncritical reliance on the Western travel accounts. One would at least expect a contextualization of Ethiopian politics as a reaction to European invasion, just as Britain reacted to the Ethiopian expeditions.

In sum, I consider Imperato's book to be a well-researched overview of nineteenth-century geographical exploration in that little-studied region around Lake Turkana, rather than a critical analysis of the political context of those expeditions. Its clear style and rich details will appeal to a wide audience.

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**War on the Savannah: The Military Collapse of the Sokoto Caliphate under the Invasion of the British Empire, 1897-1903.** Risto Marjomaa. Helsinki: The Finnish Academy of Science and Letters, 1998. pp. 305.

Scholars have long pondered the ease and suddenness with which the European conquest of Africa occurred during the closing decades of the nineteenth century. Marjomaa's book, *War on the Savannah*, is an attempt to grapple with this broader problem through a focus on the British conquest of the Sokoto caliphate. Forged under the combusive crucible of religion and militarism, the Sokoto caliphate was the most extensive and politically formidable empire in Africa on the eve of European conquest. Marjomaa's book is not so much concerned with the reasons why but rather with the method of British conquest. The study restricts itself to the traditional field of strategy and tactics exemplified in specific military engagements or battles.

The study is divided into five sections. The first two sections examine the strategies, tactics and tools of warfare employed by all the parties involved. The third focuses on nine crucial battles in the struggle for the control of the Caliphate. The final two sections attempt to articulate the motivations that drove rulers and soldiers to the horrors of warfare. Confronted simultaneously by at least three European imperial powers, separated by great distances and divided by internal squabbles, the emirates could not muster enough resources to confront the European menace. Instead they adopted an evasive policy, sometimes resorting to mass emigration (*hijira*) and hoping that the British would eventually depart. In the ensuing encounter with British tactics of pitched battles and artillery bombardment, the caliphate strategy of attrition and static defense failed dismally.

The author notes that the fundamental differences in military traditions between Caliphate and British forces should provide fertile ground for comparative studies in weapon systems, strategies, and in the motivations of the combatants. This emphasis on societal contrasts, predicated on a postulated dichotomy between the forces, breaks down on the final point: the nationalities and composition of the combatants. Europeans did not fight on the side of Sokoto, while Africans constituted the bulk of the British regular army (not its officer cadres).

In explaining why the Caliphate was unable to successfully repel British military conquest and domination, the author maintains that the strongest British asset "was their indisputable superiority in firepower" (p. 89). As for the Caliphate, Marjomaa argues repeatedly that their chief undoing was an inability "to adapt to changing circumstances" (p. 217). While some of these points must be conceded, they cannot be pushed too far. The case of Burmi shows that the Caliphate was not as closed to innovation as the author seems to infer. After recovering from the shock of their initial defeat, it took the Burmi defenders only a matter of weeks "to envisage the same tactics, trench warfare, as European military theorists were adopting to escape the effects of the firepower of modern weapons" (p. 218). With this adaptation in tactics, they inflicted a major defeat on the British forces.

That other emirates were unable to follow the path of Burmi, was not due to "their intransigence" nor to their "anachronistic" "inflexible" and "highly hierarchical military organization" (p. 218). Rather, the Caliphate, surrounded by the three imperial powers, did not have time, space or access to the modern weapons needed for a decisive response to the British military assault. As the Burmi experience shows, the encounter with European heavy firepower was not always as overwhelming as scholars have assumed. One of the lessons of modern

history (from Vietnam to Somalia) is that the possession of superior killing power does not always guarantee victory: sometimes other non-military factors are equally important.

Finally, Marjomaa spends much time analyzing the aims and strategies of the British but writes very little on those of the Caliphate authorities. He explains the motivations and tenacity of the British officers through references to the "noble" ideology of the civilizing mission. Yet he precludes the possibility of any ideological vision beyond self-preservation and material interest in explaining the "intransigence" and "stubborn" resistance of the Caliphate. Even the possible influence of a jihadist vision on this important Islamic state is examined in roughly two pages (pp. 261-263) and dismissed summarily as insignificant. The author's disclaimer, that his study is based on "source material heavily dominated by British view," should not extenuate this imbalance (p. 7).

These criticisms notwithstanding, Marjomaa should be commended for producing a well-researched history of the clash of aims and arms that resulted in the demise of the most formidable Islamic empire in Africa. While one may not always agree with some of his conclusions, one cannot but be impressed with the lucidity of his account, as well as his penetrating and incisive analysis of the nature, the muddle and the dynamism of British imperialism. This important study should be in the library of every individual and institution with an interest in military tactics or strategies, as well as the clash of civilizations and cultures perceptively portrayed in this book.

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