
Translating the Devil is Birgit Meyer's published PhD dissertation submitted to the University of Amsterdam in 1995. This book, essentially on the anthropology of evil, examines the appropriation of Christianity in an African context. That the work is the result of very extensive and painstaking study of relevant German Protestant mission archival material and fieldwork undertaken among the Ewe of Peki in south-eastern Ghana, is evident.

Pietist Protestant Christianity was introduced among the Peki Ewe by German missionaries from the Norddeutsche Missiongesellschaft (NMG). Meyer's thesis is informed by Weber's allusion to 'the gap between official theological doctrine, with its monotheistic orientation, and people's actual religious praxis with its emphasis on demons' (p. xx). The NMG missionaries, the original mediators of the 'official theological doctrine' in question here, evangelized the Ewe through the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana (EP Church, Ghana), established at the outset of their missionary endeavours in 1847. Meyer accounts for two major secessions at grassroots level from the mission church (namely, in 1961 Agbelengor, later renamed the Lord's Pentecostal Church, and in 1991 the formation of the EP Church of Ghana) by reference to the inability of the mission church to articulate a practical response to the problem and reality of evil, an enduring phenomenon in the African religious consciousness. These two seceding churches are of a Pentecostal orientation and their histories reaffirm Africa's creative appropriation of Christianity. The Pentecostal ethos of the seceding churches meant they not only defined themselves over against the original EP Church by their experiential emphasis on the Holy Spirit, but more importantly for Meyer, they provided the ritual space within which to respond to the problem of evil in the indigenous context. Meyer proposes that 'by examining the images of the Devil held in these churches, it is possible to gain insight into the intricate process of the appropriation of Christianity at the grassroots level, as well as the widespread desertion of the mission-derived churches for Pentecostalism' (p. xviii).

Translating the Devil comprises seven main chapters. One of the book's strong points is its approach. Rather than arrive at an understanding of Ghanaian Christianity through the ideas and interpretations of its academically trained church theologians, Meyer proceeds by 'investigating how a historical encounter between missionaries and Africans, which involved both the diabolization of the indigenous religion and the translation of Pietist message into its language, gave rise to a peculiar African version of missionary Pietism' (p. xxi). Thus the book aims at showing how Pietist Protestantism has been appropriated by Africans who participate in the streams of Christianity under study.

The first two chapters examine the historical and missiological encounter between Pietist Protestants and the Peki Ewe. Except for the fact that the study is located in a particular Ghanaian context, there is really not much that is new here. The perception of missionaries as the agents of civilization and modernity, the demonization of traditional religions as domains of Satan and the dismissal of the reality of evil and witchcraft as outmoded 'superstitions' by Western missions are developments that mirror the nature of the encounter between Western
missionary Christianity and Africans as a whole. As early as the mid-1950s E. A. Asomoa had suggested that ‘anybody who knows African Christians intimately will know that no amount of denial on the part of the Church will expel belief in supernatural powers from the minds of African people’ (‘The Christian Church and African Heritage’, International Review of Mission, 44 (1955), p. 297). The most important point established by Meyer’s first two chapters is that the Devil was an important figure in German Pietist Protestantism, a point graphically illustrated through the lithograph ‘The Broad and Narrow Way’ based on Matthew 7:13–14 and John Bunyan’s seventeenth century Christian classic The Pilgrim’s Progress. These two aim at the same plot by exemplifying the strict dualism between God, who is associated with soberness, and the Devil, associated with pleasure and worldly values (p. 35). The missionary approach to the world was thus driven by a dualist conception of God and the Devil. Through vernacularization (chapter 3), it became obvious that Christianity and Ewe religion held a shared belief in the ‘reality of demons’, although in the case of Christianity, traditional religion itself had been diabolized as inspired by Satan (chapter 4). Contrary to Horton’s thesis that the adoption of a High God in African conversion eventually edges out belief in local gods and spiritual entities, Meyer discovered ‘that the adoption of belief in the High God went hand in hand with the adoption of the image of the Devil, considered to be Lord of the old gods and spirits and defining the boundary between Christianity and Ewe religion’ (p. 109). Thus Meyer’s main finding, very well developed in the chapters that follow, is that, in the indigenous appropriation of Christianity, the image of the Devil defined the boundary between Christianity and ‘heathendom’, or Ewe traditional religion.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 are dedicated to showing how the image of the Devil has been appropriated at the grassroots level. Diabolization underscored for the Ewe the reality of supernatural powers like evil spirits and witchcraft, entities that they have always believed in and which in the process of conversion endured in African Christian consciousness as demons. Missionary Christianity failed to articulate an effective means to counteract evil. However, in the indigenous Pentecostal churches the fears and anxieties of members have not been dismissed. Rather, they have been catered for. The failure of missionary Pietism, unlike Ewe religion, to provide Christians with prophylactic and curative rituals to counteract evil leads to the all too familiar critique of missionary Christianity as engendering hypocrisy in local Christians. For ‘once they were in trouble, Christians virtually had to turn to non-Christian remedies’ (p. 138). It is the strength of Meyer’s study that it supplies sufficient evidence to demonstrate how through the ministry of healing and deliverance the indigenous Pentecostal churches offer the means, that is, the ritual context, by which believers could counter the forces of evil in their lives. Delivering people from evil creates the conditions which make possible the realization of the practical ends to which religion in Africa has mostly been directed: health, longevity, protection, progress and modern commodities that otherwise remain elusive. Thus contrary to social scientific theories such as are found in Weber that conversion engendered disenchantment with the world, dealing with evil led to an enchantment with the world as material progress became a distinguishing mark of Ewe Christianity. As Meyer notes in her epilogue, by linking salvation with ‘individual spiritual and material progress in life’ the Pentecostals ‘qualify as agents of modernisation’ (p. 214).

To illustrate the inability of mission churches to articulate a proper response to the needs of Christianity’s local adherents, Meyer refers to Prof. Noah Dzobo’s Meleagbe theology in which, among others, belief in the Devil is dismissed as
superstitious. Although Dzobo’s ideas generally serve to illustrate the wide gap between the inculturation ideas of the church theologians and the concerns of church members, his ideas, as Meyer seems aware, are generally considered extreme. Meleagbe theology was unique to the former Moderator of the EP Church, Ghana and it is misleading to use it as if it was paradigmatic of the sort of Africanization normally advocated by such Western-trained African theologians (pp. 137–40). Generally Meyer’s overall conclusion that the popularity of Pentecostalism in Africa is due to the movement’s provision of a ‘ritual space and language’ to deal with demons is also rather overstretched. The centrality of demonology in African Pentecostalism is undeniable, but the religious histories of these movements show that one of the main reasons for disenchantment with missionary Christianity, and of the attraction of Pentecostalism, is the inability of Western mission Christianity to integrate charismatic experiences into their spirituality as part of normal Christian experience and expression. In this respect Meyer fails to recognize the fact that many new Pentecostal churches consider the obsession with demonology by sections of the movement as unbiblical and untenable. The danger in overstretched the demonology argument is that the popularity of Pentecostalism then becomes explicable only in terms of socio-economic deprivation theories (see pp. 178–9), or as an instrument for the protection of wealth. Many indigenous Pentecostals left mission churches because they had religious experiences that could not be accommodated within the formalized structures of their previous denominations.

Undoubtedly, however, Meyer has served us well in articulating succinctly the importance of the image of the Devil in the African appropriation of Christianity at the popular level. Meyer not only states and pursues the agenda of the book clearly, but by juxtaposing the interpretations of the missionaries with those of the indigenous peoples in the discussion, she also provides an important contribution to the study of the encounter between Western Christianity and indigenous religions.

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EMMANUEL LARTEY


Plaidoyer: Jur. address to the Court; speech for the defence (Mansion, 1940)

Singleton’s book ‘Dog Lovers of Dakar: In defence of anthropological interpretation’ is indeed speech-like, in part because the author incorporates a classroom teaching or technical tone through instructive text boxes and diagrams that are nested within the prose of his central arguments. The result is a curious, genre-crossing text that is part anthropological theory and field methods manual, part data analysis, and part social commentary. The data in question come from 68 questionnaires administered to non-elite Dakar residents who, in general, find their dog-owning compatriots pretentious or, worse, irrational. The review of anthropological literature ranges from ‘gender studies’ to ‘literacy’ to ‘media studies’ and often touches back upon some aspect of human relationships to dogs. The combination reveals less about dogs or about Dakar than about the dogmatic stance some take when they are confronted with practices and perceptions different from their own.

For Singleton, ‘From dog to God is not such a large step’. Different senses of what is a ‘dog’ within one society (in this case, Senegalese) may provoke conflicts
and misconception. They are thus analogous to different senses of what is ‘development’ among several societies (in this case, Western and African), or even what is ‘God’ across any societal distinction imaginable. In the end, the book leaves us with a view of anthropology as a crucial antidote to vehement personal opinions and to the purportedly ‘neutral’ and ‘objective’, but in fact all too often prescriptive and inappropriate, practices of harder sciences that mask or deny their own cultural particularity.

The book is divided into four chapters. The first examines why and how ethnological investigation can be carried out. The second presents data from the Dakar ‘dogs’ investigation (oddly enough, not at all ethnographic in its design and results), and considers their broader intellectual, methodological and inter-cultural implications. The third chapter remains a more abstract theoretical consideration of anthropological thought’s relation of place, logics and languages, using the question of different dogs and dog owners as a mere illustration of analytical grids or grills and interpretive strategies available. The conclusion moves back and forth between the details of the ‘dogs’ study and deeper questions about how and why anthropology matters.

‘We hope the reader will see how, in anthropology, it is possible to proceed from one detail . . . to arrive without manifest discontinuity, to the fundamentals of a socio-cultural Whole’, writes Singleton (p.78). His definitions of anthropological interpretation, however, are difficult to nail down, for they are scattered throughout the experimentally structured work, and related to his principally (and admittedly) sociological study results. Singleton’s sketch of anthropology appears, however, to rely primarily on two good old-fashioned ‘strains’ in the discipline: first, ‘thick ethnographic description’ through field research and subsequent interpretive analysis; and second the dissections and combinations of meanings, both literal and cultural, that linguistic and cognitive anthropology make possible.

Yet much of the wisdom he would impart about the inner workings of anthropology is weakened by the book’s ambitious scope, by the ethnographically slim central case material, and by his almost apostolic (Singleton’s word—p. 114) commitment to better cross-cultural understanding generally. For instance, despite diagrams depicting cognitive categories, ontological relationships and the workings of analogy in anthropological analysis, the mental steps he traces are sometimes hard to follow. This might have been remedied by more explicit reference to classic anthropological works on language and the description of cultural or ecological systems, which seem conspicuously absent (Conklin, 1962; Frake, 1980). And while Singleton characterizes anthropology as uniquely attentive to both the particular and the paradigmatic, he does not cite seminal work on changing social theories of structure and agency (Giddens, 1979; Sewell, 1992). Nor, to strengthen his vision of anthropology, does he offer much in the way of contemporary Africanist anthropology that elaborates the relation between event and process, between individual action and social structure, and between current ethnographic practice and the vestiges or heritages of older anthropological trends (Moore, 1987, 1994).

The book, in fact, raises many interesting questions that its combinations of central arguments do not allow it to address completely. It may nevertheless provoke excellent classroom discussion; indeed it is intended largely for a readership of students, European and African. It might also seem relevant to a variety of Africanist social scientists who do field work, or simply to teachers of sociology and cultural anthropology, whatever their region of expertise. Certainly any reader must admire Singleton’s command of both English and French language sources, as
it reflects and reveals his life’s work in both Britain and Belgium, in both English- and French-speaking African regions.

Some readers more bent on research structure will find, as I did, that while Singleton’s connection of a specific question about inter-African relationships to wider theoretical debates is refreshing, the study about dog owners in Dakar could have been better explicated had it served less as an example. Some readers may also share my reaction against the book’s paternalistic (if well-intentioned) tone. Or my reservations about Singleton’s relatively superficial survey of a series of complex and fundamental debates within anthropology, in order to bolster his own perspective about what humans in general and Africans in particular need in order to be ‘understood’. Finally, certain readers might wish to learn more about dogs in Dakar, or about anthropological theory and practice, than this innovative, idiosyncratic book will offer them.

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Most readers of this book will want to know ‘What is African philosophy?’, and before long will realize that there is no easy answer. A straightforward description of African philosophy is not possible, since intense debate rages over the nature and even the possibility of such philosophy. The issues raised in the book range beyond those of African cultural studies and politics. There is an exhilarating sense, at times, of observing a painfully emerging discipline struggling to relate ancient wisdom for oral traditions within tribal practices, and Western rationality with its very different languages.

Imbo gives access to the debates and to their wider implications, by focusing on five questions. Each of his five chapters raises a specific question and examines it by quoting from the major discussions, and making many thought-provoking connections. At the end of each chapter, he has provided study questions which can profitably be used as a guide to the main points of the chapter, or to gain access to some of the wider issues not treated in the book itself.

The first chapter discusses many of the problems surrounding the question, ‘How is African Philosophy to Be Defined?’ Not only the nature, definition and justification of a distinctively African philosophy is considered here, however. The assumptions and methods of the various branches of traditional philosophy, and their shared general characteristics such as universality, are called into question. Imbo shows how philosophical presuppositions are challenged by various approaches to African philosophy. He concentrates on the ethnophilosophical (culture-specific), which is contrasted with the universalist and hermeneutical approaches. Profound conceptual differences between, and also within, each of these views, are indicated by summaries of the major protagonists.

The political dimensions of the challenges which have emerged in chapter one are further explored by raising the second question, ‘Is Ethnophilosophy Really Philosophy?’. Imbo examines criticisms of ethnophilosophy which he shows to be, itself, a largely pejorative term. He also outlines how an intricate web of unwritten and unsystematic rituals and belief systems can be defended as philosophy, in the literature in this field, in differing, sometimes conflicting, ways. His summary of the criticisms shows that the very different theories of being (ontologies), theories of
knowledge (epistemologies) and cosmologies which contribute to African philosophy are considered to cause it to fall prey to a major objection. That is, that such a philosophy lacks the possibility of critical reflection in many areas of discourse, including that of ‘liberation’, not only from white male domination, but also from European-dominated thought structures.

The distinctive emphases of African philosophy—on myth, proverb, art and ritual—raise the question of the third chapter, ‘Is African Philosophy Unique?’. The discussion here centres upon the stereotypical characterization resulting from the ‘European invention of Africa’, which needs to be overcome if the relevance of Africa to the global community is not to be diminished.

Some of the difficulties of breaking away from European-dominated thought structures are then elaborated by Imbo’s consideration of the question, ‘What Should the Language(s) of African Philosophy Be?’, in the light of the danger of destroying the ‘collective memory’ of African peoples by the imposition of foreign languages. Written language is contrasted briefly with dynamic forms such as drumming, as well as with the oral traditions. To reflect the richness of the cultures embodied in a multitude of dialects within more than a thousand mutually unintelligible languages, is an insurmountable difficulty for traditional philosophy, Imbo thinks, due to its emphasis on the Greek ‘logos’, or rationality expressed in a certain form of language.

However, the enormity of the task of the appropriate recognition of African philosophy can perhaps be given attainable perspective by forging links with other movements with similar concerns. Imbo therefore, in his final chapter, asks, ‘Are There Connections Among African, African American, and Feminist Philosophies?’. He considers the deconstructive aspects, the liberation struggles and the similar coping strategies of all three, finding a convergence of interests. The making of useful connections, together with transcultural and transnational communication, can produce, Imbo thinks, the sort of flexible conceptual framework strong enough to challenge the value-systems of traditional philosophy, and participate fully in the next phase of the history of ideas.

The book thus ends its survey of the debates on a positive note. There is, however, an uncomfortable and perhaps unavoidable tone of defensiveness at times. This, together with a superficiality approaching parody in the treatment of traditional philosophy, tends to detract from the thought-provoking material presented. But the lack of sustained argument is offset by the provision of extensive notes and bibliographic details, by means of which this significant and fascinating area may be pursued.


This book is a worthy product of three decades of research by the author on the economic history of Ghana. Set against the background of Akan peasant traditional gold-mining and the world-wide ‘gold rush’ of the nineteenth century, Dumett exhausts all the possible sources of data and shows an impressive technical mastery in dealing with the subject of the transition from traditional to capitalistic
mechanized mining in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, an era of intensive capitalism and hesitant colonialism. Consequently, the work advances not only the economic but also the socio-political history of the Gold Coast or Ghana.

The coverage is adequately wide. It includes the assortment of European, Euro-African and African bogus, ill-equipped and solidly-based companies and their local and foreign collaborators involved in the ‘gold rush’; the problems of finance, management, technology (transport and mining machinery); of labour, both local and migrant; of the perils of the weather; of health and housing; of law and order; and of the policies of indifference and indecisiveness of the incipient colonial state towards economic development and the mining industry. It shows the continuous interplay of indigenous and capitalistic mining, the cross-fertilization between the two sectors, and how the success of the leading companies depended on the use of local geological knowledge, management skills, and labour arrangements, in particular the persistent abusa, produce-sharing, system.

There are noteworthy conclusions in the book. It is firmly established that local mining depended only marginally on slaves. The instability of local labour, which led to the recruitment of West African labour from Liberia and Sierra Leone, was due to the agricultural calendar, cultural demands, and opportunity costs as between traditional mining and engagement in modern mining. The mining industry brought West African migrant labour to southern Ghana just as the centuries-old northern trade brought the peoples of the savanna and the Sahel to the northern and central parts of Ghana. The present Ghanaian problems of weakened chieftaincies originated in the impact of the commercialization of land transactions and the uncertainties of Akan land tenure. Finally, the mining industry, both indigenous and foreign, served as a catalyst in the monetization of the economy of the country. Dumett’s method of generally discussing the problems of the mining industry, and then isolating the more successful companies for the elucidation of those problems, and the manner of overcoming them, gives an impression of repetitiveness and, perhaps, unduly lengthens the book. But the end-result rewards the patient reader. Two minor points of correction. Wam (p. 185) is in the Brong, not Ahafo section of the Brong-Ahafo region. Governor Hodgson (p. 287) asked and searched for, but did not seize, the Asante Golden (paramount) stool, physical symbol of Asante kingship.

In all, the book deserves the serious attention of all students of Africa. I note, incidentally, that its appearance coincides with an end-of-century ‘gold rush’ in the Western, Ashanti and Upper Regions of Ghana.

Ofankor, Accra

NANA ARHIN BREMPONG


The Anglo Boer is an area in which serious modern military texts are scarce. The standard work, Pakenham’s Boer War, now seems narrow and partisan in its approach. It is with interest then that one approaches these two military studies of the events of this war. Battles of the Anglo Boer War is resplendent with two-tone
maps (British in Red, Boers in Blue) and these are notable in giving the names by which the various Commandos were known. It includes a comparative chronology of the Eastern and Western fronts, with useful map references. Sadly, the glossary is somewhat basic, given the plethora of inscrutable Afrikaans vocabulary to be found by the newcomer. Each battle is covered in depth, giving the background, topography and opposing forces. The battle narratives themselves are crisp and concise, but one can’t help feeling that some discussion of the tactical options available to the commanders would have been helpful. Neither is there any historiographical discussion of sources or references.

Each field action is accompanied by a clear order of battle, and the indexing by unit and cross-referencing with the maps displays a thorough approach. The appendices, too, are well executed, for example the essay on ‘Horse Problems’ is linked to the text in an informative way. However, when we come to the vexed question of internment camps, Baker mentions ‘careful research of British and South African Records’ but no references are offered, a curious omission given the controversial nature of the topic. There is also an index of ‘personalities’, that is to say British and Boer leaders, but no mention of African leaders. This may be an unfair criticism since Baker seeks to account for the tactical actions of the war and attempts no discussion of the wider political and social ramifications.

In general, the lack of sources and references hampers the usefulness of this book to the academic reader. A bibliography would have greatly enhanced the value of this work. Moreover, the binding is of poor quality and after a few readings my copy is now looking quite tired and bruised. Nonetheless, there is a wealth of information contained here, collated logically into a single volume. The large number of detailed maps would make this comprehensive guide an ideal companion for anyone making a battlefield tour to South Africa.

Huw and Meurig Jones’ work is in the same format. African-born Meurig Jones is chair of that august fellowship, the Victorian Military Society, and involved in the Boer War Memorial project. His expertise in this field is therefore second to none. The encyclopaedic gazetteer is well laid out, and in contrast to Baker’s volume, extensively footnoted, making due reference to the Official History and the Times History of the war. The glossary is both helpful and informative, with some discussion of the philology and orthography of South African place names. Curiously the maps, collected together at the beginning of the book, are printed in far better resolution than the ‘Battles’ volume, but lack scale. This is unfortunate, for readers need to understand the sheer vastness of war on the veldt. Jones’ preface talks about his particular standpoint and pedigree, and these comments are borne out by the thoroughness and excellent organization of the work, which ultimately should be the acid test of a worthwhile gazetteer. This is a valuable reference work to accompany either a visit to some of the battlefields mentioned, or even whilst reading a selection of the other secondary works on the subject that will appear during the centenary years.

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Tony McLeod


This volume will provide an exceedingly useful work of reference encompassing many of the post-1945 conflicts in Africa, across-the-board subjects such as mercenaries, the roles of the United Nations, the Organization of African Unity and
Relief Agencies, also with overviews of the policies and roles of the major world powers, the United States, France, the Soviet Union and Britain. Carefully compiled and researched, the book will help both tutors preparing class work and many an undergraduate with an essay to write.

The work is at its best in the political analyses where causes, participants, political personalities, attempts at mediation and end-states are excellently presented. Arnold's definition of civil war is broad and includes almost all the possible examples, though two surprising omissions are the late 1990s events in Guinea-Bissau and the 1977 and 1978 attempts by Zaire Shaba insurgents to overthrow Mobutu by taking Kolwezi.

Less satisfying is the treatment of the military aspects of the various conflicts. In the case of Algeria, for example, there is no mention of the French use of helicopters or of the outstandingly successful operations of General Challe, the ablest of the French generals. In the Ogaden war the importance of Soviet General Petrov's classic even if small-scale air-land battle at Jijiga is not recognized. In the Angola fighting of the 1980s the very able field commanders, South Africa's generals Geldenhuys and Liebenberg, UNITA's Demosthenes Chilinguitula, and Cuba's Cintra Frias (as well as the hapless General Onchoa, later executed by Castro on charges almost certainly trumped up) were all important figures, deserving mention by name. Also, the two weapons that have played so large a part in fighting in Africa since 1960, the Soviet AK47 Kalashnikov rifle and the RPG-7 grenade-launcher, should have led a section on military technology, especially as their fire-power is often transported in trucks. 'Toyota War' is becoming Africa's special contribution to modern warfare.

But these are comments from a specialist military standpoint. The succinct political summaries and analyses of so many different conflicts assembled in one handy volume, including also a valuable bibliography, should ensure the work a deserved place on both university and general library reference shelves.

De Montfort University

Anthony Clayton


This outstanding work, by the Professor of History at Cape Town University, is a classic which will deservedly become the basic text on the South African War for all students of imperial, South African and military history. Further, it is very difficult to put down. Nasson's dégagé style and wry observations on the motives, abilities (or lack of them), and behaviour of leading players make the work totally enthralling to read. No undergraduate can have cause to complain.

The opening chapters deal with the actual and very widespread causes of the war, together with summaries of the arguments and justifications about and for it in vogue at the time. There then follow the main military chapters, the first on the Boer offensives, the next two on the British offensives, one being those of the incompetent Buller culminating in Black Week, the other covering the much more professionally competent if also much more professionally ruthless operations of Roberts and Kitchener.

Here Nasson writes with a masterly understanding of technical military issues. The last two military chapters cover the guerrilla phase of the war, and the bitterness emerging between those Boers who wished to fight to the last and those
who saw the best use of their declining military power to be that of securing better terms. The concluding chapters set out a summary of popular attitudes held by both sides on a consequence of the war, and a stimulating re-viewing of the war in the context of post-1948 South African history. In his own summary Nasson summarizes the effect of the war on Australia and Canada, both of whom contributed troops physically fitter than the British, on the enormously important supportive roles of the African, Coloured and Indian auxiliaries, and on the Edwardian British Army. While noting that the Boers chose war with their eyes open, Nasson nevertheless reminds them and us that they received, in the war, a taste of the fate they themselves had earlier meted out to African peoples. For the British the war saw the final demise of any concept of a liberal ethical imperialism in this cruel and dingy imperial conquest after which, and here Nasson draws on A. J. P. Taylor, the worst elements in both communities emerged as the real victors.

The depth of Nasson’s researches, and analyses, and the conclusions he draws will fascinate the reader, but he never overlooks the suffering of ordinary people—the Boer farmer with a farm torched by British soldiers, the women and children in flight or in internment camps, the hard-driven and exploited Black auxiliaries, the typhoid or enteric fever-stricken British Tommy. The South African War was a peculiarly unpleasant one, despite the efforts of both sides to present it in romantic or epic terms.

De Montfort University

ANTHONY CLAYTON


Carolyn Hamilton’s inventive study of historical representations of Shaka Zulu, amongst the best known of all pre-colonial African leaders, covers a period of more than 150 years and engages vigorously with a broad historical and theoretical literature. The fact that very little is actually known about Shaka, coupled with his status as an iconic symbol of African initiative and statesmanship on the one hand, and of barbarous Zulu despotism and cruelty on the other, means that Shaka offers enormous potential for historical construction and deconstruction. But Hamilton is not only concerned with changing representations of Shaka and the political purposes to which these have been put. She is equally determined to use such material as a foil for wide-ranging discussions of historiography, oral history, memory, ethnicity, theories of representation, the politics of knowledge, and so on. The book is structured around treatments of several modes of representation including near-contemporary written accounts, oral-based sources, novels, a film, and an associated theme-park display. Careful periodization and the adoption of a consistent line of interpretation enable Hamilton to produce a coherent and challenging book.

Terrific Majesty begins, appropriately, with the earliest known accounts of Shaka produced by travellers and memorialists in the 1830s. Hamilton argues that the colonial vilification of Shaka began only after his violent death in 1828, replacing earlier accounts by traders and others which treated him in a rather more favourable light. Within the Zulu kingdom Shaka’s merits and character were extensively debated by Africans at this time and later, differing views being strongly shaped by
competing political interests and succession disputes. Notably, it was only in the 1870s that Shaka re-emerged as a significant and controversial figure within colonial discourse. The 1879 Anglo-Zulu war, which did much to bring South Africa as a whole into prominence as a colonial issue, was the obvious catalyst for the reinvention of Shaka. Theophilus Shepstone, the influential Natal Secretary for Native Affairs who pioneered the ‘Shepstonian system’ of personalized indirect rule, adopted Shaka’s mantle in order to secure legitimacy both for himself and his methods of governance. Shepstone’s researches into Zulu history in the 1860s revealed Shaka as a model worthy of emulation: a powerful martial figure who succeeded in bringing stability to a fissiparous kingdom but whose unyielding style of leadership nonetheless conceded ultimate British sovereign power. Through his skilful appropriation of Zulu rituals, symbols and traditions, Shepstone was able to pose as the first in a long tradition of aspirant ‘white Zulus’ and to become a key intermediary between the white colony and the African populace of Zululand and Natal.

If Shepstone sought to embody Shaka it was Rider Haggard, Shepstone’s literary amanuensis, who did more than any other single individual to project compelling images of the Zulu to the outside world. Through his first-hand accounts of the Anglo-Zulu conflict and in his many thrilling novels Haggard helped to define the key tropes which characterize so many popular images of Shaka and Zulu-ness and to express the ambiguous relationship of Europe to Africa and of ‘civilization’ to ‘barbarism’. At a scholarly level the meticulous researches into Zulu oral traditions conducted by James Stuart, a native administrator and acknowledged ‘expert’ on Zulu affairs, did much to confirm Shaka’s pre-eminence in Zulu history. His research also provided new authority to Shepstonian traditions of paternalist native governance at a time when racial segregation was being elaborated and systematized. Shepstone and Stuart shared a clear understanding that successful native administration depended on a profound understanding of Zulu cultural logic, as well as the ability to manipulate such knowledge to the benefit of settlers and the colonial state.

Hamilton picks up her discussion of Shaka in the 1980s through a consideration of the making of the television mini-series ‘Shaka Zulu’ and the creation of the Shakaland tourist spectacle. As a means of discussing the late-apartheid period and the making of a ‘new’ South Africa, this chapter works very well, but there is no concealing the awkward temporal gap in coverage from the 1940s when her treatment of Stuart comes to an end. Hamilton’s dissection of the ‘Shaka Zulu’ mini-series centres on the mixture of motives and confluence of conflicting interests which underlay the making of the film, as well as the ways in which the state broadcasting corporation attempted to use this drama to project positive images of a reforming apartheid social order. This discussion leads directly on to a remarkable ethnography of ‘Shakaland’, a theme park-cum-tourist resort situated on the borders of Kwa-Zulu. Shakaland made ingenious use of the Shaka film-set as the basis of a reconstruction of Zulu society, past and present; in so doing it consciously promoted notions of racial reconciliation and redemption and sought to play a part in forging a new sense of South African citizenship and identity. Though critical of the Shakaland experience in certain respects, Hamilton avoids cheap jibes. She seriously entertains Shakaland’s ambitions to facilitate genuine insights into Zulu culture and argues that the calculated artifice of the exhibit was a key to its success in initiating white visitors into the cultural politics of the post-apartheid era.

_Terrific Majesty_ is in many respects a product of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Its political concerns reflect the rise of Inkatha as a political movement...
under the leadership of Buthelezi, the upsurge of ethnic violence in Natal and on the Reef, and the contestations around Zulu identity which accompanied this process. In theoretical terms it engages both with post-colonial theories of representation as well as explorations around the production and meaning of history. One of the great strengths of this book is its judicious discussion of competing theories and the willingness of its author to resist simplistic and formulaic treatments of European cognitive domination of the colonial world. Hamilton’s training in Africanist history leads her to insist on the importance of indigenous discourses and to highlight the complex nature of the colonial encounter. She denies the view which holds that ‘Africa’ is little more than a colonial construction, demonstrating wherever possible how local African understandings of Shaka themselves shaped European perceptions. Hamilton is also concerned to hold on to some sense of a real recoverable past and is therefore sceptical of the notion that perceptions and images are all that we can know. It is partly for this reason that she reprieves James Stuart, the compiler of a unique oral archive of Zulu history, from simple condemnation as an appropriator of Zulu culture and an intellectual servant of white supremacy.

Much of the material contained here will be familiar to those either already conversant with Hamilton’s work, or well-versed in theories of representation and ethnic invention. In addition to the author’s published material, a considerable amount of the ground has already been covered by writers like Cope, Golan, Marks, Martin, Wright and others. At times Hamilton’s internal arguments with such scholars detract from the analytical drive of a work that stands well on its own. But this is a minor criticism of a book which is undoubtedly bold and ambitious. What makes it especially distinctive is the subtlety of its analysis and its use of theoretical counterpoint to qualify established lines of argument that have almost attained the status of a new meta-history: the tradition of historical invention. But, as Hamilton’s sub-title suggests, and as she convincingly demonstrates, history is not an infinitely malleable discourse. Attention to the limits of historical invention are as interesting and important as history’s susceptibility to renovation. Historical traditionalists may take comfort!

University of Sussex


This work is, essentially, an introduction to the political process which led to the destruction of the apartheid state. It is not the outcome of original academic research, rather it is a work of summarization and synthesis. The aim, in common with other books in the Greenwood Press series ‘Guides to Historic Events of the Twentieth Century’, is to produce ‘an accurate, informative and readable’ book which outlines the main events shaping a particular significant episode in twentieth century history. The structural elements of the work are therefore given by the requirements of the series. The question becomes one of usefulness and fitness for this purpose.

The book is clearly written and based upon a combination of narrative, informed by up-to-date and significant sources, and ‘topical’ chapters. ‘Topical’ chapters include ‘Racial Separation’; ‘The Parties and the Process of Transition’; ‘Internal and External Pressure’; ‘Challenges of a New Democracy’. To this is added a
biographical section: ‘Biographies: The Personalities Behind Apartheid and Its End’ (sixteen biographies!) and a document section, ‘Primary Documents of the End of Apartheid in South Africa’ (thirteen documents in all!). ‘Primary Documents’ are sub-divided into ‘Opposition to Apartheid’ and ‘Post-Apartheid’ documents and it is certainly useful, for teaching purposes, to have a number drawn together in one source-book. A Glossary and an Annotated Bibliography complete the volume.

It is possible to challenge much of this. Few would consider that there were only sixteen personalities behind recent history or that merely thirteen texts are an adequate basis for thinking about the transition from apartheid to democracy. Again, in the chapter on ‘Racial Separation’, the headings for the discussion are based on a form of apartheid nomenclature e.g. ‘The Indians’, which is, perhaps, not adequately challenged. These are areas in which either some modesty or some sensitivity or a theoretical framework could have helped. South African history can only really be a critical history.

On the other hand, the chapters offer a simple, atheoretical narrative which gives a context and sequence of events capable of introducing new readers into the relevant political and social events, whether these are domestic or international. There is occasionally over-simplification and greater use could have been made of references and bibliography. However, there is normally care in synthesis together with a willingness not to take any personality or institution as already understood. These features will make the work a useful descriptive resource for those new to South African issues. In the context of academic teaching, however, it would best be used in combination with more analytical works.

University of Birmingham

Willie Henderson


An African Country at War is a book which aims to integrate African voices into the history of the Second World War, and Jackson does this by focusing on human agents, recorded thoughts and actions of men and women in the country as they were caught up, either directly or indirectly, in the events taking place well beyond their country’s borders. Not content to deal in generalities of change, Jackson explores unfashionable details of history in order to challenge ‘a blanket view’ of the war’s impact on sub-Saharan Africa (p. 7). This work focuses on all levels of society, including the war’s impact on women and on agricultural production.

The significant chiefs, such as Tshekedi and Bathoen, were pro-enlistment. In their eyes, any demonstration of loyalty to Britain would contribute to the success of their efforts to keep the country out of the clutches of the South Africans. On the whole, their policy was a success. Arden Clark cultivated Tshekedi carefully (in sharp contrast to his predecessor Rey) and on the whole the administration and the chiefs worked hand-in-hand during the war years. Tshekedi manipulated his power, often using recruitment to remove malcontents. The chiefs put out the call to the people, but ‘most men went of their own free will’ (p. 50). Motives for going were mixed, though Jackson manages by interview to give a sense of what individuals felt at the time. The interweaving of key themes with individual testimonies is a significant feature of the work as a whole.
When recruitment was required, the response was swift. There were to be, eventually, 11,000 men involved. Initial training took place in Lobatsi. Their fate was to be part of the labour force . . . that kept the Eighth, Ninth and Tenth Armies in the field’. The first contingents were soon off to the Middle East where they dug tank traps, guarded munition dumps and learned to be soldiers. Only later did some train to operate as anti-aircraft gunners. A policy of ‘dilution’ challenged single-tribe companies and had to be approved by the chiefs. Tshekedi did not like this though it was eventually put in place. The Batswana working as gunners felt like true fighting soldiers and Jackson argues that they were content with their lot. Any issues of discipline or welfare were generally resolved within the Batswana themselves. Several RSMs were chiefs or related to chiefly families. Promotion was on merit though the men sometimes were concerned about differences in status.

The need to keep the home population informed led to the development of better communications within Bechuanaland as well as to other changes on the domestic front. Soldiers remitting money meant that there was more cash in circulation. Export of cattle also increased but so too did taxation. Attempts were also made by the administration to boost grain production. The ‘warlands’ scheme was not a success because of the lack of popular support. Economic differentiation seems to have accelerated. Inflation had an impact on the country as it had elsewhere. Profiteering by white traders was also a problem. Women were faced with bringing up children on their own but were supported by the extended family. They experienced the same problems and frustrations as women elsewhere in war time. But there was, in contrast to elsewhere in Africa, ‘no radicalization of the home front’ (p. 240). Returning ex-service men were going back to a relatively stable local political climate.

Jackson is also good on demobilization, seen by the British as an opportunity to educate men for positive work in their communities. On the whole army educational activity was a failure. Delays with demobilization led to problems with discipline. Tshekedi, in the meantime, redoubled his efforts to find an independent basis for development in the country. When men returned they were celebrated in the Batswana fashion and then expected to get on with their lives. Any cocky characters were soon told by their elders to toe the line. So they returned to domestic activities, farming and cattle management. There were few challenges made to local political structures. Chiefs such as Tshekedi were still held in high esteem though he was challenged by ex-service men at Mswazwi. This was in the context of a political situation which had developed over time and had little to do with the war as such.

On the whole Jackson argues that the re-integration of the servicemen posed no problems and that the war did not radicalize people in Botswana. There was no national arena and local politics were under local control. It did, however, hold up political change and when change came, in the shape of Seretse Khama’s marriage, it blew Tshekedi’s kingdom apart. Whilst it retains just a little of its origins as a thesis and paints a somewhat cozy view of empire, this is a book which I enjoyed reading. It will be of interest to specialists on Botswana. It will also be of interest to those interested in wider histories, for it deals in detail with the preparation of African troops, race relations within the forces as well as domestic issues caused by war-time conditions and the absence of menfolk from the country within the context of wider literature on colonial Africa at war. Botswana, it seems, is always different.
Decentralization is a crucial topic in the study of contemporary African politics as it is central in public sector reform and high on donor agendas for support. There have been other waves of interest in decentralization, but the present one is more intense as it is tied in with donor conditionalities and is a part of comprehensive philosophies about restructuring the state. The subject matter of this book is therefore highly topical, and the approach taken here is much better than is usually the case.

The outstanding merit of the book is its empirical basis, which contrasts with the highly ideological tenor of most contemporary writing on decentralization. These normative statements advocating decentralization use a language reminiscent of advertisements for soap or soft drinks: it cleans, brightens and refreshes. There are some studies on the implementation of decentralization, but these tend to be so stereotypical that they convey little information on the variety or possible variety in human experience. They usually come to the conclusion that the whole implementation exercise has been botched, mainly due to the ill will of those in power. This book is much more open-minded and detached. It is composed of four cases: Karnataka state in India; Bangladesh in the Ershad period; Côte d’Ivoire; and Ghana. The cases can be read separately and the comparison between Asia and Africa is a minor theme in the book, so it is of particular interest to people studying Côte d’Ivoire and Ghana. Unlike the general tenor in writing about decentralization, where a general management perspective disembodied from time and place is dominant, in this book administrative reforms are clearly situated in particular political cultures and power structures. The Côte d’Ivoire experience is linked to attempts to reinvigorate a political system which had become stultified by ossified patterns of patronage and a dominant party that did not want to lose control. The latter manifested itself in the peculiar form of a winner-takes-all system based on lists: a simple majority brought a whole team to power while minorities did not get any representation. Powerful political figures ran for mayor accompanied by a team of potential councillors. The effect was that the ruling PCDI won virtually everywhere and did not have to cope with opposition. The introduction of District Assemblies in Ghana is similarly situated in the political constellation. The Rawlings government wanted to build a popular base by allowing more voices to be heard from below, but was at the same time concerned to contain opposition. In Ghana, the elections for District Assemblies continued without party competition (no-party elections), even after the reintroduction of multipartyism. The elections could not, therefore, be a platform to rally opposition. The administrative reforms are, however, also situated in struggles within the ruling party and within the bureaucracy. For example, the authors point to the paramountcy of the Ministry of Finance because of the economic imperatives of Structural Adjustment which unavoidably lead to considerable centralism. This is ironic as decentralization tends to be advocated strongly in Structural Adjustment Programmes, especially in the so-called second generation of reforms. Rich observations in this book show much more ambiguity and paradox than are uncovered elsewhere, and these are often most strikingly found in the small details. For example, in a note referred to on p.53 the authors subtly disagree with Ayee who has written prolifically and pessimistically about decentralization in Ghana: ‘It should not be concluded that Presiding Members (non-executive
chairmen of the assemblies) were merely government stooges, however (as Ayee implies). As with other nominated members they were often people with sufficient local status and prestige to act as effective critics of district administration. Not having any political base they were both free to criticise but also powerless when it came to the District Secretary'. The District Secretary, who is appointed by the centre and usually well connected to the top of the party, is the executive head of the district administration. Such an example brings out the nuanced way in which they observed and evaluated what happened. The result is that Crook and Manor discern much more participation and responsiveness than other literature on the topic. That is especially so with respect to issues like elections and leadership turnover. They do not resort to mindless optimism, however, and there is ample material—especially in relation to the quality of service provision—to be sceptical about the effects of the reforms discussed.

It may be clear from these remarks that the richness of the book is in the detail, but that is also its weakness: one has to search for the gems. In fact, the book is often turgid. This is caused partly by its origin in consultancy work for the UK Overseas Development Administration (now the Department for International Development). Consultancy reports need first and foremost to satisfy their terms of reference rather than present a coherent argument resulting from the serendipity inherent in research. Another reason for the inflated nature of the book is the strict adherence to a comparative framework. The general situation is first described in each country, then two selected districts are examined and, thirdly, a survey is carried out among citizens in those districts. The methods and concepts used are the same in all four countries. This may be laudable from the point of view of intellectual rigour, but it does not produce a flowing narrative. Lastly, the book suffers here and there from empty verbosity stating the obvious. I do not get much meaning out of a sentence like: ‘Regardless of the levels of popular participation, or the degree to which elected representatives genuinely consult with and ‘represent’ their constituents, the impact of enhanced participation can only be felt through the work of elected representatives at the institutional level’ (p. 135). This is followed by two more sentences of this nature, which are equally bland and close to platitudes.

There is thus much of value to be found in this book, but it is hard work to extract it. This is especially regrettable as it makes the book difficult to access for students and there is such a need for good teaching material of this nature. A revised, shortened and updated version of this material would therefore be extremely welcome.

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JAN KEEK VAN DONGE


This is an important book which deals delicately with a treacherous subject: the way in which seemingly universal concepts gain a distinct interpretation in particular cultures. Such interpretation has been used as an excuse for many an undemocratic move in Africa where, especially in the one-party state, the particular African version of democracy was often the ultimate legitimization of restrictions on democracy. Today, this is less and less acceptable, but everyday life in Africa makes it obvious that there are different interpretations across cultures. For example, in the run up to the multiparty elections of 1994, my students in Malawi
would rate unity among the opposition as a political value above all, but would deny vehemently that this was a legitimization for one-party rule. In Western contexts, diversity of opinion is much more associated with democracy than unity. Whatever is meant by democracy can therefore vary considerably, and this book documents the meaning which the word—transformed into the Wolof word *demokaraasi*—has acquired in the context of the Senegalese political system. *Demokaraasi* is a word that belongs to folk culture as distinct from the elite discourse in Senegal which uses French rather than Wolof. The word emerged only after the reintroduction of multipartyism and is therefore clearly associated with political competition, but its new meaning is not. Two particular values are dominant in *demokaraasi*: consensus and equity in sharing. Schaffer makes the meaning of puzzling sentences clear in their cultural context: ‘A Dakar carpenter explained that there used to be *demokaraasi* here in the days of colonial rule. The Korite prayer, for example, took place only once. When someone announced the time of prayer, everyone agreed. If everyone looks for the moon and sees it at the same time, that is *demokaraasi*’ (p. 60). At first sight it seems nonsensical to call the colonial period particularly democratic, but the sentiment expressed becomes comprehensible in a cultural context—if one knows that in recent times religious leaders have often disagreed about whether the moon, signalling the end of Ramadan, has been sighted. The shift in meaning is obvious: democracy in its universalistic aspirations presumes a consensus on the rules of the political game, but that is a consensus on the value of diversity and definitely not a consensus for the sake of consensus as in the Wolof meaning. Similarly, in *demokaraasi* the meaning that everyone should participate in ruling has transformed into a meaning that everyone should benefit from rule: ‘As we say in Wolof, the mother of twins lies on her back. To permit each infant to suckle a breast as it likes, when it likes, that is *demokaraasi*’ (p. 63). The word has thus acquired a number of meanings which are at best only remotely related to concepts like competitive elections, tolerance for dissenting minorities, etc. However, while the connotations of *demokaraasi* are positive, the opposite is the case with the Wolof word *politig* derived from the French word *politique*. *Politig* stands for everything deceitful, including outside an explicitly political environment: ‘I go to a tailor. Instead of sewing my shirt with tight solid stitches, he does shoddy, careless *politig* work; work that should have been done well, but is poorly, intentionally so.’ (p. 77).

Schaffer places this analysis within the context of Senegalese political development—characterized by a dominant party—as well as the major features of the dominant religion in Senegal—the Soufī-inspired mouride brotherhoods. The book is, however, of interest to anybody who is interested in the study of democratization in general and not merely to those interested in Senegal. The reason for that is not only that Schaffer makes most interesting comparative remarks—for example, with the American use of the word democracy and the French use of the word *politique*—but also that his approach clarifies phenomena that are found throughout Africa after the reintroduction of multipartyism. The tendency of the opposition not to accept electoral defeat, for instance, is closely related to his explanation of the idea of even-handedness that does not recognize winners and losers. The political value of consensus pervades the attempts to form broad political fronts, as is common in Africa, instead of forming political parties with an appeal on policy positions. The latter would admit the legitimacy of diversity of opinion and recognize dissension.

Finally, the book is valuable reading for those interested in discourse analysis. Its use of the method is exemplary in that it so clearly links the use of
language—which is fairly easy to document as the manifold references to eating in the study of African politics show—to social forces—which is much more problem-atic: who uses which words in which social context. A footnote on p. 114 alludes to the difficulties of connecting the use of language to particular patterns of social behaviour, but this study achieves that more than any other attempt I know. That is certainly the case with respect to voting patterns, although when Schaffer moves further from the actual political arena it becomes less convincing. He imputes values in society when he sees mutuality as inherent in peasant societies in order to cope with economic uncertainties. He implies that this is goal-directed behaviour, but this may not be the case. The strength of his political analysis is just the contrary: the values that structure behaviour emerge from careful observation and empathy. One must get close to another culture to do that successfully and Schaffer has succeeded in this. This is therefore a book that can be read with pleasure by anybody who likes to use social science as a means to appreciate the diversity of mankind.

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JAN Kees van Donge


Alec Russell is a distinguished journalist. *Big Men, Little People* is an account of his contacts, personal experiences and first- and second-hand perceptions of old and new-style African political leadership, the ‘big men’ of the book’s title. In this work he looks at leaders in Africa directly through his own eyes and indirectly through the eyes of others or through incidents which encapsulate the political society they have helped to create. This is done in a series of perceptive and exciting essays on various leaders, starting with Mobutu ‘The King of Kleptocracy’ and finishing with Nelson Mandela, in a chapter called ‘Madiba Magic’. In between he deals with Banda, Moi, Savimbi, De Klerk, Terre’Blanche (Why here?), Buthelezi and Mswati. Only the first three (strictly two and a bit) are seen as old-style ‘big men’.

Each article is written in a fast-paced journalistic style with great leaps of narrative from one end of the continent to the other in ways which sometimes confuse. This is a style which academics do not take easily to, but Russell knows how to construct and milk an incident, whether it be a corrupt encounter in the Congo or giving a flavour of Mandela’s approach to wooing Afrikaners, depicted as a ‘mixture of blokishness and brio’. He is particularly good at selecting titles for his articles: ‘The Last Days of a North London Doctor’ is how he heads the essay on Banda and ‘The Cold War Crooner’ is his epithet for Savimbi. His portrayal of corruption under Mobutu (Russell finds the political consequences of Mobutu particularly loathsome) is fascinating. One of the most telling incidents is his depiction of a human rights group in Kisingani, *Les Amis de Nelson Mandela*, recording in a ledger, ‘incident by incident’, human rights abuses committed by soldiers in their town (p. 15). The aspirations of a group that had never been much beyond their own town and the collective name they had chosen for themselves suggest hope in the heart of darkness. In the kaleidoscopic and startling world of incidents and outrages that Russell seems to have inhabited, the focus sometimes provided on small, vulnerable people becomes all the more moving.

Russell is at his strongest when depicting, say, the sense of Moi’s political style or the obsequious nature of the courts of old-fashioned ‘big men’ or on the ‘dual ethos’
of the world inhabited by Buthelezi. His eye is accurate and his capacity to create a sense of threat or of danger or of the absurd, excellent. There is even pathos in the account of Mobutu's confusion at his fall from power—his wife took command of the household's departure and 'half the luggage was left on the runway' (p. 29)—or in Banda's view of his detention 'Bitter? Why? I am indifferent' (p. 54). He is perhaps on less sure ground when he attempts to make an analysis of difficult issues such as 'tribalism'. He is good at illustrating the issues and on the quick judgment, a judgment from which no-one is spared, not even his preferred leaders, less sure on the solution. The erosion of political regimes and the disruption of states are easier to depict that to mend.

This is a book filled with insightful comments, both first- and second-hand, and telling incidents. There may well be a role for this in teaching, e.g. contrasting the creative non-fiction of Russell's account with the academic analysis of leadership and of corruption. How, I wonder, do Russell's three 'c's of bigmanism, 'corruption, crackdown and cult' (p. 43), compare with the academic analysis? If you wanted to introduce a stranger quickly to the contradictions and fascinations of sub-Saharan African politics and society, this might serve you very well, even if you were not prepared to go along with all of the judgments and generalizations made.

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WILLIE HENDERSON