BOOK REVIEWS / COMPTES RENDUS

**History and the testimony of language**, by Christopher Ehret, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2011, 274 pp.

For over 40 years, sitting in a secure post at UCLA, equipped with an amazing recall of facts, great energy, a fierce and confident determination to follow his chosen direction, Ehret has been blazing two trails. Along one, he took the conventional methods of historical and comparative linguistics and developed new sophisticated tools for uncovering prehistory, by showing where and when early communities lived, how they were related to others, how they lived, and how they interacted with their neighbors. On the other, he applied these methods to Africa, focusing on eastern and northeastern Africa, but also including North, South, and West Africa. While there are other specialists who might know more about small parts of the African linguistic field, he is the preeminent overall scholar in these fields.

Ehret is that rare phenomenon, a historian who can understand, handle, and innovate linguistic material. That is not said lightly: I recall a conversation with an African archaeologist who said that, faced with a choice between evidence from archaeology and linguistics, he would always rely on the former. Not surprisingly, he, as most African prehistorians, had no training in linguistics. In any case, examination of prehistory ought to combine all viable types of evidence; it is not a black and white choice.

The nine chapters of the book are mostly reworkings of earlier chapters or articles, dating from 1981 to 2006, so cover much of Ehret’s career. The first five, “Evidence and Method”, reflect the first path mentioned above, the last four the second path. Chapter 1, “Methods and Myths”, a general introduction, not a reworking, sketches linguistic methods for historian readers, has an overview of major contributions and contributors in the field, and presents the chapters in context. Chapter 2, “Writing History from Linguistic Evidence”, introduces well the basic techniques of the reconstruction of history from linguistics, and shows how findings from linguistics and archaeology can be combined, using largely examples from Nilo-Sahara. Chapter 3, “Historical Inference from Transformations in the Vocabularies of Culture”, goes on from there to assess what examination of semantic change in cultural vocabulary will reveal about the history of ideas, organization of knowledge, and human activities. He uses three semantic fields – domestic stock, kinship terms, time reference – and examples mainly from Bantu- and Cushitic-speaking communities. Chapter 4, “Historical Inference from Word Borrowing”, presents an elaborate template for different types of word borrowings, with examples taken from inside and outside Africa. While many non-linguists think primarily of language contact in terms of words, linguists tend to think of that as only one of the several results of language contact. So, as a linguist, I would have liked to have seen a parallel chapter deal with these other results, and would also have liked to have seen a wider acknowledgement of templates used by scholars other than those of the author and his students (e.g. Thomason and Kaufman 1998; Mous 2003.)

As linguistic events do not come with dates attached, and as historians are interested in dates, Chapter 5, “Linguistic Dating”, is a necessary component. There are a number of
controversial issues here, especially that of glottochronology. Given that the author is an enthusiastic proponent of the use of glottochronology, this is a well-balanced chapter, with an impressive array of examples from all across Africa. Chapter 6, “History in the Sahara: Society and Economy in the Early Holocene”, is an amazing overview of early prehistory in the eastern Sahara and greater northeastern Africa from 15,000 BP (Before Present). There is something for every reader in Chapter 6. It deals with the roles of gathering, agriculture, and pastoralism among early Afrasian and Nilo-Saharan communities, and should be read by those who still have lingering thoughts that Afrasian (“Hamo-Semitic”) originated in the Middle East. Chapter 7, “Social Transformation in the Horn of Africa: 500 BC to 500 CE”, is the shortest chapter, dealing with Semitic and Cushitic communities, and their interaction, in northern Ethiopia. Chapter 8, “Recovering the History of Extinct Societies”, is a nice cameo of the development of communities in the Taita Hills, in eastern Kenya, from 2,000 BP to near the present. Finally, Chapter 9 is an entertaining presentation of the spread of new crops across East Africa over the last five centuries, by tracing the words that refer to them. Finally, there are five maps, five appendices, and 34 figures.

Writing a book like this entails choices. Too much data, too many phonological rules, too much detail turns non-linguists and publishers off; too little data, plus too many sweeping overviews upsets linguist readers. I think the author makes most of the right decisions (perhaps more maps – most readers are not familiar with all of eastern Africa). It will appeal to diverse audiences: those interested in Ehret, wanting an introduction to the use of linguistics in prehistory, and those looking for a good introduction to prehistory in eastern Africa. If used as a course text or by readers wanting a discussion of his views of the rest of Africa, it would need to be supplemented by one of his other books of the last 10 years.

Bibliography

Thomason, Sarah Grey, and Terence Kaufman. 1988. Language Contact, Creolization, and Genetic Linguistics. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Mous, Maarten. 2003. The Making of a Mixed Language: The Case of Ma’al/Mbugu. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: Benjamins.

Derek Nurse, FRSC
Emeritus, Memorial University of Newfoundland, Canada
dereknurse@shaw.ca
© 2012 Derek Nurse

Little mother: a novel, by Cristina Ali Farah translated from the Italian by Giovanna Dellezia Contuzzi and Victoria Offredi Poletto, Introduction by Alessandra Di Maio, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2011, xxvi + 235 pp.

This novel presents the experience of Somali refugees in Italy in the first 15 years after their dispersal (1991–c. 2006) as a network of interconnected and crisscrossing personal stories and histories. It has three narrators, who each take word in three chapters. The first is Domenica-Axad, the daughter of a Somali father and Italian mother, whose story chronicles her struggle to claim and grow into an identity that is both Somali and Italian and not a truncated version of either. The second major character is Barni, a midwife, who grew up with Domenica as her paternal cousin and whose narrative deals most explicitly.
with the mutual distrust and resentment that divides Somali refugees in the wake of the
civil war violence. The third narrator is male. He is the kind-hearted but bumbling
Taageere, whose story of divorce and (eventually) a new marriage to Domenica highlights
the incapacity of (some) Somali men to live up to what the women in their lives need from
them in their new environments.

All nine chapters are monologues in which the narrators weave back and forth between
Mogadishu 1991, the chronological beginning and narrative axis of their physical
dispersal, and the evolving present that, at the novel’s conclusion, spans more than 15
years and ends with the decision by Domenica and Barni to jointly raise Domenica’s son.
Within the tight and intricate structure of the novel, the narrators freely associate to tell
their life stories, which, as they contain and intersect with other refugee lives, form the
dynamic, unstable, and ever-moving bubbles of Somali diasporic existence. Thus the
meandering monologues and the wide range of characters that connect them become
the narrative vehicle by which Cristina Ali Farah represents Somali refugee experiences as
she sees and interprets them.

In this depiction, the novelist appears to favor her female characters. Although these
latter include strong and independent women as well as overly obedient wives reduced to
 unhappiness by controlling husbands, the male characters are (and, as the story evolves,
remain) more invariably flawed. Barni, the midwife, gives the following explanation for
this:

It’s so difficult for our men to invent a role for themselves. To redefine themselves. To adapt.
To accept themselves. To humiliate themselves. Because you see, for us women, in the end,
those fixed points, our home, our daily life, motherhood, the intimacy of our relationships,
they are like little signposts that save us from getting lost. (29–30)

Indeed, the hopeful ending of the novel derives from women’s solidarity and their
commitment to raising their children without bitterness. As Domenica puts it: “And I say
that what happened happened and there is nothing we can do about it, except stop, listen,
and change direction” (11).

In the novel women prove to be at an advantage not only in overcoming trauma and
adapting to the new conditions of life in exile but also in coming to terms with the violence
of the past. Barni’s story shows most explicitly how she deals with the tendency among
Somali refugees to categorize each other as either friend or enemy on the basis of their clan
backgrounds and to identify each individual with the violence perpetrated in the name of
his or her clan back home. Having found refuge in Italy, Barni married a young man from
across the divide of the communal violence of 1991. This meant ignoring the objections of
family members who saw the young man she loved simply as a member of the enemy clan.
However, when Barni and her husband, after several years of marriage, separate, his
rationale is the same as that of the earlier detractors of their marriage, except that now he
accuses her of being of the wrong clan. He could no longer share a bed with me, Barni
writes, because of “all the murders we – my genealogy – had committed” (44). Barni
rejects the simplistic dichotomies that underlie such collective blaming and reflects: “us
and you, murderers and victims, victims and murderers, who is who, if all you have to do is
switch perspectives?” (144). With hindsight, she believes that her young husband’s real
reason for leaving her was “his long humiliation, his guilt at not being able to support his
own wife, his revulsion at being dependent on a woman” (144).

Another example of how Barni struggles with, and moves beyond, clan resentments is
her relationship with Ardo, a Somali girl she meets on a commuter train. Barni starts out
distrusting and resenting Ardo, who appears to be wearing the custom-made golden
earrings young gunmen had forcefully taken from her just before she had to flee Mogadishu. Thus she associates Ardo with “the other side”, the side that was responsible for the expulsion and death of many of her relatives. When the earrings had been taken from her in Mogadishu in 1991, Barni had been on her way to deliver the baby of a friend – a friend she never reached and whose fate she still does not know. It is not until she is called upon to deliver Ardo’s baby that she is able to let go of her distrust and rancor. She writes (158): “That baby was washed, washed of all resentment. We had settled our debt with the nabsi” (that is to say, with guilt and punishment). That Ardo had obtained the earrings by accident and had no association with the gunmen who took them is something that, in the story, comes to light only after Barni’s change of heart.

Through the multiple narratives and perspectives of the novel, the author is able to juxtapose sharp criticisms of Somali refugee life with a generous understanding of its painful challenges. As a result, this novel has much to offer to Africanist scholars. It speaks to the burdens of growing up with a hyphenated (Somali-Italian) identity in a context in which being Somali became synonymous with statelessness and international undesirability; to how Somali refugees struggle with the legacy of communal violence and ongoing civil war; and to the complexities of changing gender relations. However, through the Somali example, the novel also offers insight into the material and psychological challenges of African lives in exile more generally. It goes perhaps without saying that the stories Cristina Ali Farah tells in this novel include hilariously funny ones – such as when Taageere’s first wife uses a Somali wadaad (or community-level religious figure) to talk him into divorcing her by long-distance telephone. There are many real-life tragicomic episodes like this.

The translators and Indiana University Press have done an excellent job in making the novel accessible to non-Somali specialists. In addition to the glossary, which was part of the original Italian edition, they included a list of the names of the main characters and provided footnotes where Somali poetry is interwoven with the narrative. Di Maio’s introduction is helpful in situating the novel in its post-national, Italian-language literary context, though it ignores the novelist’s important gestures towards truth and moral reconstruction in the aftermath of the communal violence of the Somali civil war.

Among the rising generation of Somali novelists, Cristina Ali Farah is one of its most subtle thinkers and greatest writers. This novel comes highly recommended.

Lidwien Kapteijn
Wellesley College, Wellesley, Massachusetts
lkapteij@wellesley.edu
© 2012, Lidwien Kapteijn

“The future is in the hands of the workers”: a history of FOSATU, by Michelle Friedman, Johannesburg, University of the Witwatersrand, 2011, 128 pp.

This book was inspired by an exhibition and panel discussions held at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) in May 2009 to mark the thirtieth anniversary of the creation of the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU). It was produced by the Historical Papers section of the Wits library, which houses the FOSATU archive. The book has a foreword by COSATU General Secretary, Zwelinzima Vavi, and an introduction by Philip
Bonner, eminent historian and Wits professor, who was involved in FOSATU’s creation. While written by Michelle Friedman, the book’s structure, discussed below, meant that a number of people were involved in its creation and ample credit is given to Wits Historical Papers curator Michele Pickover and researcher Brown Maaba.

FOSATU was South Africa’s first national non-racial federation of trade unions and existed from 1979 to 1985, when it was absorbed into the new Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). Despite its pioneering role in South African labour history, FOSATU has largely been forgotten because, as Friedman points out, the more recent and still operating COSATU is better remembered and the ruling African National Congress (ANC) version of history tends to downplay the internal struggle against apartheid. The South African economic boom of the 1960s led to the expansion of the black urban working class that, with the economic hardships of the 1970s, began to form trade unions to press for better working conditions and salaries, and the removal of racial discrimination in the workplace. In 1973 white Marxist academics formed the Trade Union Advisory Coordinating Council (TUACC) to coordinate and assist the new unions – which TUACC insisted had to be open to all races - and this eventually led to the formation of FOSATU, with an initial membership of 45,000 in three registered and nine unregistered unions. Although critical of apartheid, FOSATU initially took an apolitical stance because police harassed trade unions until the early 1980s and there was concern that workers’ interests would be subordinated by the nationalist struggle. This was informed by the earlier history of the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU), which had been formed in 1955 in political alliance with the ANC and closed in 1963 when its leaders went into exile because of state persecution. In the era of Black Consciousness, there were also criticisms that FOSATU was dominated by white intellectuals even though the federation worked hard to develop democratic structures and relied heavily on black shop stewards.

Intended as an educational resource for schools and workers, this book presents a chronological history of FOSATU with chapters on its formation, what it stood for, its influence on labour law such as the 1983 Supreme Court decision to prevent the government from registering unions on a racial basis, the involvment of women and sometimes their abuse within the union movement, international relations, organizational structure, major strikes such as at Colgate-Palmolive in 1980, worker education programs such as courses at Wits that were cancelled by the University Council in 1982, state repression, including suspicious deaths in detention, and the launch of COSATU. This attractive soft cover publication is richly illustrated with many colour and black-and-white pictures of FOSATU members, meetings, strikes, posters, symbols, and important documents. Interspersed throughout are short quotes from FOSATU members about their poor and racially discriminatory working conditions and the impact of union activism. There are also numerous text boxes with short biographies of FOSATU leaders, and information and questions on the role of trade unions in post-apartheid South Africa, where COSATU is allied with the governing ANC. Historians will particularly appreciate the life stories of people like Alec Erwin, who was the first general secretary of FOSATU and later a minister in Thabo Mbeki’s administration; Rick Turner, who was a University of Natal academic involved in the labour movement and was assassinated by the apartheid state in 1978; Jabulile Ndlovu, who was a leader in the FOSATU affiliated Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU) and killed along with her husband and daughter in an attack on their home during the turbulent late 1980s; Moses Mayekiso, who was a MAWU shop steward charged with treason and later general secretary of the gigantic National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa (NUMSA); and Chris Dlamini, who was a leader
of the Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union (SFAWU), which, in the 1970s, broke down apartheid divisions by attracting white members, with Dlamini later serving as FOSATU president. The book asks important questions meant to stimulate discussion about the current position of organized labour in South Africa such as: is there a contradiction in a union federation representing millions of workers being in alliance with a party in government whose avowed policy is one of maintaining the capitalist system? And, in an age of globalization, is international solidarity still possible? If yes, then does it facilitate or retard international solidarity among workers?

Friedman presents a thorough, concise, and extremely readable history of FOSATU that rescues an important labour movement from historical obscurity. Although the book was produced for South African students and workers, it will certainly be of use to anyone interested in South African and/or labour history. Since this book might be difficult to obtain in North America, it should be pointed out that it is available through the Wits Historical Papers website (www.historicalpapers.wits.ac.za).

Tim Stapleton

*Trent University, Peterborough, Canada*

*tstapleton@trentu.ca*

© 2012, Tim Stapleton

---

**Divining without seeds: the case for strengthening laboratory medicine in Africa,**
by Iruka N. Okeke, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2011, x + 222 pp.

From a perspective including an early childhood in Great Britain, repatriation with her nurse-trained mother and siblings to their Nigerian homeland, and then training and employment as a microbiologist in labs and teaching in Nigeria and the United States, Iruka Okeke argues for significant expansion of diagnostic laboratories in Africa’s clinic and hospital systems to improve infectious disease outcomes. Written in a journalistic style, her book might appeal to non-microbiology program officers or administrators in the international health donor community, entering health and social science students who want some understanding of the international health situation in Africa from a personal angle, and world traveling lay people with an interest in African health. A few dates and references appear to need further editing; however, the book is still interesting to read overall and shows more historical and sociocultural depth than many in the biological sciences.

Okeke blends her combined insider and outsider personal and technical perspective to demonstrate the social and financial cost of insufficient laboratory diagnostics during colonial and more recent history, noting that drug resistance might be curbed, and the lab costs could be balanced by eliminating inappropriate pharmaceutical use and cost. Historical case examples for malaria, tuberculosis, typhoid, cholera, poliomyelitis, hemorrhagic Marburg, Ebola virus, Lassa fevers, HIV/AIDS, syphilis, and other STDs illustrate her cost–benefit argument, albeit in a manner that eventually becomes a bit lengthy and repetitive. However, this is also her point, that the situation has a long history and should not need much further evidence to justify investment in change. She argues a lack of will, or clinical inertia, rooted in the colonial legacy that continues to frame the healthcare education and delivery model, and the value of expatriate versus African recovery from infectious diseases common to the different African regions.
Okeke’s perspective is not simply a Western allopathic medicine versus indigenous medicine argument. Being Nigerian, she recognizes that people have an array of healthcare options – household, traditional natural and spiritual healers, allopathic physicians, nurses, pharmacists and dispensary technicians – to consider in terms of using their time and finances to effect an outcome. She is also familiar with examples in Ghana and the Gambia, which she has visited professionally, as well as aware of many other continental African and Malagasy examples in the literature. She argues that the traditional healers may often be operating from the experience of numerous outcomes of their actions per observed pattern of common symptoms that is more rational than allopathic physicians who prescribe medications solely on presumptive assumptions without much observation of the patient or any laboratory diagnostics. Indeed, Western medicine in the United States, where Okeke currently teaches, is still confronted with how to overcome diagnostic error when providers do not have timely access to adequate information about a patient, or are overconfident in their initial impression based on choosing the most common, least complex diagnosis. Okeke argues that while this latter tactic is often cost-effective in Western settings with less fatal often self-resolving viral and bacterial infections, a delay of correct diagnosis of African infectious diseases, while experimenting with multiple ineffective prescriptions, is a waste of limited money and medications, sets up drug resistance to cheaper more available medications, and is too often fatal.

Okeke posits that laboratories and tests are realistic in the African setting, wherein many more common tests are a century old, or require little complex equipment dependent on potentially limited or unavailable electricity or refrigeration. However, she does note that many of these supplies are not presently locally produced in Africa, although they need to be. For that matter, we might note that clinics may not currently have sufficient medicines in stock, and more of these also need to become locally produced. She disparages the situation whereby donors fund complex laboratories to focus on a single infectious disease, such as HIV, or temporarily bring in researchers in “spacesuits” to confront an emergent viral epidemic, leaving no operable infrastructure and staff in place to continue the work, or extend the work to more locations afterwards. She advocates that more basic labs test all the common local infectious diseases, while African tertiary care sites should have more complex analytic capacity.

Whether Okeke’s passionate appeal will sway present politicians, donors and managers of revenue, laboratory supplies, staff and training to enact her suggestion remains to be seen, given that Africa, and even the United States, Great Britain, and the European Union are facing some what of a crisis over governance and the relevant appropriation of financial, material, and human resources. We often cannot coordinate efforts to alleviate other health parameters like food security. Hence, laboratory diagnosis of infectious diseases may not become common in a locale where profit, political hold, and expatriate military or personnel support seem the more prevalent motivators, overtaking any humanitarian ethic or community motivation. Okeke’s book may potentially influence a newer generation of microbiologists, healthcare program officers and donors, so educators might consider using it in their courses to illustrate healthcare conditions in Africa.

Sabrina H. B. Hardenbergh

Department of Anthropology, Southern Illinois University Carbondale

sabrina@midwest.net

© 2012, Sabrina H. B. Hardenbergh
In exploring the many conflicts in post-colonial Africa, William Reno provides a useful analytic overview of the evolution of warfare and armed groups in sub-Saharan Africa across more than 50 years of independence. To do so, Reno offers a comprehensive set of “typologies” of rebel groups, given that the majority of conflicts in Africa in recent decades have included such non-state armed fighters, as opposed to the classical warfare typified by the national armies of established states pitted against one another. Reno’s work is a welcome addition to his previous books on African politics, particularly his Warlord Politics and African States (1999) and his study of Sierra Leone’s state and warlords (1995).

The bulk of this important book is devoted to describing the five “categories of rebels” into which, presumably, virtually all armed groups in sub-Saharan Africa can be placed: anti-colonial rebels, majority-rule rebels, reform rebels, warlord rebels, and parochial rebels. This attempt at classifying African armed groups builds on previous scholarship on the subject, notably Christopher Clapham’s 1998 edited volume African Guerrillas (1998). In his introduction, Clapham devotes a few paragraphs to discussing “typologies” of insurgencies in Africa (5–9), in which he describes a strikingly similar pattern of classification to Reno’s: liberation insurgencies, separatist insurgencies, reform insurgencies, and warlord insurgencies. Strangely, nowhere does Reno mention this conceptual foundation; Clapham’s edited book is not discussed nor cited, although Reno notes that he is indebted to him in his Acknowledgements as Clapham’s “work and advice guided me in the right direction” (xiii), with Clapham returning the favour by providing the book a positive review on its back cover. In contrasting these two authors’ rebels/insurgencies categories, we find that Reno divides Clapham’s liberation insurgencies typology into anti-colonial (e.g. the Liberation Front of Mozambique [FRELIMO], the People’s Movement for the Liberation of Angola [MPLA], and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola [UNITA], 37–78) and majority-rule rebels (the Zimbabwe African National Union [ZANU], the South West Africa People’s Organization [SWAPO] in Namibia, and the African National Congress [ANC] in South Africa, 79–118). While doing away with Clapham’s separatist insurgencies (e.g. the Sudan People’s Liberation Army [SPLA] in then southern Sudan; the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front [EPLF] in Eritrea), which the former defines as fighting to “represent the aspirations and identities of particular ethnicities or regions” (Clapham 1998, 6), Reno instead develops the category of “parochial rebels”: local-defence groups “who fight to protect circumscribed communities” (13). Overall, Reno goes several steps beyond Clapham’s brief approach, providing readers with robust and detailed accounts of each typology.

One of Reno’s main and most insightful arguments in the book – “that the nature of politics in the state in which [rebels] fight plays a key role in shaping the organization and behavior of rebels” (161) – lends itself well to understanding some of the major African conflicts in recent memory. In doing so, Reno offers an alternative and compelling perspective to the familiar “greed and grievance” framework: that rebels typically fight to control lucrative loot-able commodities such as diamonds, gold, and coltan or over issues of marginalization, exclusion, and underdevelopment. Rather, Reno points to the importance of the breakdown in these states’ patronage networks as key factors in the development of rebel groups. For example, in discussing Liberia in the late 1980s and the rise of one of Africa’s most notorious warlords, Charles Taylor, Reno asserts that it was the “character of the disintegration of [former president] Doe’s political network
rather than the abundant grievances among most Liberians or Liberian ideologues that weighed most heavily in shaping the rebel groups that emerged” (177). Similarly, Reno argues that Congo’s war has been “very much about individuals repositioning themselves as an old presidential patronage network fragmented” (196), and that the war itself “reflected the nature of pre-conflict state politics and the collapse of political networks that were based on state rulers’ personal control over resources,” (203) and not simply ethnic rivalries or a rush to exploit natural resources. This nuanced approach should help policy analysts and practitioners alike understand the complexities of such ongoing wars as those being fought in the Congo and in Somalia – especially given the United Nation’s military involvement in the former, and the African Union and now Kenya’s engagement in the latter.

Reno’s use of Eric Wolf’s “fields of leverage”, which Reno defines as autonomous social spaces in which rebel leaders organize people around a political vision (126), is a helpful concept that figures prominently throughout his book. Being outside of state control, these areas allow rebel leaders to link fighters and supporters’ grievances and interests to the grand narratives used to convince people to join the insurrection (31–2). As Reno argues, fields of leverage are especially crucial for “reform rebels” (e.g. the Tigray People’s Liberation Front [TPLF] in Ethiopia, the EPLF in Eritrea, the National Resistance Movement [NRM] in Uganda, the Rwandan Patriotic Front [RPF] in Rwanda, the Somali National Movement [SNM] in Somaliland; and the SPLA in southern Sudan), since leaders had to find and develop these areas in order to channel resources and not ignore the interests of local populations (160). This shines added light into these rebel groups, and is of critical contemporary political importance, considering that these six examples listed above have since fought their way to power and currently form the governing regimes in the respective countries.

While extensively researched using a combination of desk and field analysis, and with a constellation of acronyms across the numerous case studies, it is puzzling that numerous extant groups are only mentioned in passing, if at all. Discussion of armed groups terrorizing civilians in the Congo since the mid-1990s, for example, is accorded only a few pages (196–203) in the chapter on warlord rebels – a surprising decision, not only given the multiplicity of armed actors present, but that the ongoing war in eastern Congo is the home of the deadliest conflict since the Second World War, with over 5 million killed since 1996 and counting. Exploring two of the country’s most important and persistent armed groups, the Congrès National pour la Défense du Peuple (CNDP) and the Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Rwanda (FDLR), would have yielded interesting discussions. After all, while clearly warlord rebel organizations, the CNDP and FDLR combine the “greed and grievance” model in the context of former president Mobutu’s crumbled patronage network; both are extensively involved in the multimillion dollar exploitation and international trade in so-called conflict minerals, while also claiming to be fighting to defend their ethnic group and for ethnic pluralism back home, respectively. Additionally, considering President Obama’s recent decision to deploy troops to Central Africa, the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), one of Africa’s oldest and most brutal rebel groups, should have warranted more than a brief mention. While noting the importance of the LRA’s leader in the group’s survival since its emergence in Uganda in the mid-1980s, the fact that Joseph “Kony’s goal to create a government based on his interpretation of the Ten Commandments is unique among major armed groups” (3–4) only begs the reader to wonder in which category Reno would have placed the LRA (reform rebels or warlord rebels?), given its marauding behaviour across four Central African countries.
Arguably, one ponders on the curious choice for the book’s title, seeing as its contents reflect more an attempt at organizing sub-Saharan African rebel groups into different categories than describing warfare in post-colonial Africa. While somewhat disjointed and rushed, Reno’s concluding chapter raises a number of interesting issues surrounding the nature of African conflicts in the coming decades; in particular, the “alternative fields of leverage”, such as YouTube and other decentralized forms of communication (252–5) used by tech-savvy insurgents, which are all the more relevant to explore given Al-Shabaab’s recently reported use of Twitter. Poignantly noting on the final page that wars in sub-Saharan Africa typically “contain elements of multiple types of rebels” (255), Reno’s categories are thus especially useful for any grounded and thorough understanding of the development and dynamics of armed actors in African conflicts, both past and present.

Bibliography
Clapham, C., ed. 1998. *African Guerrillas*. Oxford: James Currey Ltd.
Reno, William. 1995. *Corruption and State Politics in Sierra Leone*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Reno, William. 1998. *Warlord Politics and African States*. New York: Lynne Rienner.

Greg Queyranne
University of Cambridge
gmq2@cam.ac.uk
© 2012, Greg Queyranne

**Race and slavery in the Middle East: histories of trans-Saharan Africans in nineteenth-century Egypt, Sudan, and the Ottoman Mediterranean.** by Terence Walz and Kenneth Cuno, eds, Cairo, American University in Cairo Press, 2010, xiv + 264 pp.

As the editors of this fine collection of research essays state at the outset, until recently slavery has not been a major area of focus for historians of the modern Middle East. The authors cite a number of reasons for this lacuna. First of all, setting aside Sudan, which had a much larger slave population, slaves represented less than 1% of the population in the Ottoman Mediterranean. Thus, secondly, small slave communities and other marginal populations have often been elided in national historiographies. Finally, the study of slavery has been limited by the lack of documentary sources.

The nine essays in this volume use untapped and under-used sources to bring the story of sub-Saharan Africans in the modern Middle East into sharper focus. An effort has been made to elucidate the social lives of Africans in such localities as Cairo, rural Egypt, Khartoum, Turkey, and Crete. Furthermore, there is an overarching concern to properly interrogate quantitative and qualitative sources, which range from census data and police records and depositions to memoirs, travelers’ accounts, and military reports, while also accounting for the important issues of race and gender.

More specifically, Emad Ahmed Helal discusses the role of Africans in Muhammad Ali’s slave army in the 1810s and 1820s, arguing that Sudanese slaves were successfully integrated into the “mixed slave army” ranks and later played important roles in the various war fronts. Drawing on the 1848 census, Terence Walz presents a portrait of sub-Saharan Africans in Cairo. With his focus on two specific districts, al-Jamaliyya and Abdin, he provides a glimpse of the lives of male and female Africans in Cairo, their occupations,
marital situations, and social networks. Similarly, Kenneth Cuno draws on census data from two registers (1848 and 1868) in order to construct a preliminary picture of slave communities in rural Egypt (al-Daqahliyya province). He seeks to situate the growth of slavery within the wider contexts of peasant mobility, agricultural expansion linked to the cotton boom of the 1860s, changing marriage patterns, and local understandings of “race” and ethnic difference. George Michael La Rue usefully draws on European sources in exploring the lives of African slaves in European households in Cairo. In a different vein, Hakan Erdem focuses on the life of one African slave woman, Feraset, based on the transcript of her interrogation deposition in Ottoman Izmit. Further to the south, Ahmad Alawad Sikainga documents the emergence of cosmopolitan urbanism in Khartoum in mid-nineteenth century Sudan. Drawing primarily on European travelers’ accounts, Sikainga accounts for the contributions of slaves, ex-slaves, women and migrants in forging a distinctive urban culture. He shifts the focus to the Turco-Egyptian period (1821–84), arguing that, although “urbanization, modernity, and leisure activities in Africa” are often connected to European colonialism, the case of Sudan suggests that these sorts of developments and processes were already well underway before the Anglo-Egyptian period of colonial rule (1898–1956). In his study of Crete, Michael Ferguson seeks to overcome numerous silences in the historical record in accounting for the presence of Africans in the northern tier of the Ottoman Empire. Liat Kozma focuses on manumitted female slaves in Khedival Egypt. Beginning with the story of Saluma, a Sudanese freed slave who was kidnapped and smuggled to Nablus (Palestine), Kozma emphasizes the precarious position of many freed female slaves. Drawing on police records from Cairo, the author demonstrates the ways that gender and skin color added certain risks and vulnerabilities to manumission. In a different register, Eve Troutt Powell examines the contentious debates over the family in late-nineteenth century Cairo. Powell demonstrates how one Egyptian nationalist thinker, Abdallah al-Nadim, sought to valorize the role of women in the household economy, challenging British assertions that the Muslim Egyptian family was a sort of “prison for women”.

In terms of criticism, this volume missed an opportunity to situate itself in relation to more relevant historiographies. Early in the introductory essay, the editors evoke the historiography of slavery in the United States. While there is a basis for comparability between US and Middle Eastern variants of slavery, more useful comparisons might be explored between slavery in the Middle East and slavery in African societies. Indeed, given the importance of trans-Saharan linkages, it seems a disservice to largely ignore the rich literature on slavery and post-emancipation societies in Africa itself. Furthermore, fruitful comparisons could be made with slavery and post-slavery societies in the Maghreb. Finally, while there are two city maps of Cairo and Khartoum, in addition to a series of provocative photographs and illustrations, the book lacks regional maps.

On balance, this book is a welcome contribution to the literature on slavery. It provides rich empirical studies of sub-Saharan Africans in the Middle East. And, furthermore, the collection demonstrates the tremendous potential for future research on slavery, trans-Saharan connections, and racial difference in the modern Middle East. Indeed, the time is ripe for more in-depth studies of slavery and the slave trade in this neglected region.

Brian J. Peterson

History Department, Union College, New York

petersob@union.edu

© 2012, Brian J. Peterson
Philosophy in an African Place, by Bruce B. Janz, Lanham, MD: Lexington: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009, x + 272 pp.

Bruce Janz is a wandering Canadian, and luckily he spent some time in Nairobi during his sabbaticals, where he got to know the philosophy (and person) of H. Odera Oruka before Oruka’s death in December 1995. Deeply familiar with the wider body of publications on the topics of African philosophy, and interested in approaching those topics through the themes of recently developing fields of philosophy of place and geography, as well as Deleuzian ideas of philosophizing by generating new concepts, Janz’s book is therefore a fresh approach to the field of African philosophy. Many of his critiques are generated by the fact that many contemporary African philosophical works written in English have been influenced by analytic philosophy and so, as Janz says at one point, verge on the positivistic and reductive side of the broad field of philosophy.

He begins his book by mentioning Derrida’s challenge: where ought philosophy to take place? While we often emphasize that philosophizing could be done anywhere, and maybe, if the emphasis is on abstract ideas, we might think it is not even important where philosophy is taking place, Janz instead insists that philosophizing responds to a context, “a particular set of conditions of reflection” (2). Janz himself likes the challenge of describing what it means to philosophize, but he notes that in the context of African philosophy there has often been a skepticism and an insult linked to the inquiry whether and how philosophizing can be done in Africa. The question that Janz wants to set himself, without scorn but rather with enthusiasm, is what does it mean to philosophize in this African place? This is not just a geographic location, but rather a “milieu” — here he draws on Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty’s ideas of embodied knowledge in its context of experience shaped by mediating devices such as technology. He also draws upon Barry Lopez’s description of experienced places as “aggregates of meaningful experiences encoded into material or legible structures” (14). Philosophy can then be understood as big-picture self-reflections on living in and contributing to a certain milieu. Or in other words, it is “critical rational reflection on an African life-world.” (13)

Janz’s emphasis is on the dynamic present of Africa, and he does not want to reinforce tendencies he sees in African philosophy which lionize or reify and glorify the past as “traditional” Africa. He does not want to search out “uncontaminated” sources of African thought and belief, a project doomed to fail because most contemporary philosophers, even those in Africa, have had extensive training in Western philosophy. He also wants to reject, or at least complicate, this idea of “purity of culture,” while still holding out the importance of cultural integrity, even in the midst of productive tension which reflection and changes bring about. And he wants to start with African questions, rather than African beliefs.

While Janz charts the course he proposes to take in this book, he cannot help but criticize practices which he describes as defending the “territory” and asserting ownership of African philosophy, as a “space,” which is different from understanding philosophizing in a “place” (the latter having all the nuances of milieu). In chapter 3, Janz surveys such “taxonomies” of the field put forward by Oruka, Smet and Nkombe, and Mudimbe. The incessant “mapping” and categorizing of different methods and approaches bogs down the field; yet Janz thinks Odera Oruka’s philosophy nevertheless has tools that can be used to address the questions of place.

His second chapter deals with the topic of tradition. While some African philosophers like Paulin Hountondji have dismissed the importance of African tradition altogether, others
like Kwame Gyekye have found it to be a fruitful source of philosophizing. However, tradition has often been regarded as an aspect of our lives that resists rationalization or practices we are willing to take for granted rather than to scrutinize. Janz admits that many traditional ideas are outmoded since they applied to earlier contexts before current social structures, government, or technology. But rather than see tradition either as a link to the “pure” past or hindrance to changes of the future, why not emphasize what it means for our lives today, that is, as our way of life, the way we live in places with narrative and symbolic meaning? Whenever we philosophize we do so in a context of place, which includes indebtedness to tradition.

In his third chapter Janz raises questions about reason. In the context of African philosophy there has been a quandary, explained earlier by Robert Bernasconi in this way: either African philosophizing is so different that it is perhaps not considered philosophy by others; or else it is the same, in which case it lacks any distinction. Odera Oruka, in his co-authored book *The Rational Path*, advocates a universalist understanding of reason that is not shaped by culture but rather scrutinizes all of culture’s beliefs. Yet Janz points out that rarely are any of culture’s beliefs found to be in logical contradiction – it is more often that they are found inadequate in accounting for experience. But all three authors – Oruka, Jesse Mugambi and J.B. Ojwang – explain that they seek reason because they want to bring order to their lives and society. Janz likes this emphasis, and explains that he wants to begin his philosophical reflections by asking: What is reason’s goal? Janz calls into question some of the presumptions that reason and religion should be at odds, or that reason is better than myth. He refers to Paget Henry’s work in *Caliban’s Reason* to argue that “mythic thought” should be seen as an ally of reason. For example, “mythic reasoning is crucial to ego construction, and is an important corrective to the ‘blind one-sidedness of the project of technocratic reason’” (88). Janz wants to argue that reason’s *history* is significant. Janz claims that reason never occurs *anywhere* in purely abstract form. Taking the best of what he has found in the works of various African philosophers, Janz proposes that we develop the concept of “generative rationality,” which combats the idea that the West has already developed the standards of reason. While reason is rule-governed, it is an ethical activity, in which rational systems are judged as adequate or not in describing experience. He suggests that Barry Hallen’s work on the onisègun’s rational system is an example of the generative rationality he is advocating. Janz also suggests that anthropology (as a contemporary field with all its advances, not as the old colonial approach) can help in creating studies of African philosophy, where the emphasis is not on sterile “classification and evaluation of propositions” but rather on “the uncovering and critical evaluation of meaning within a particular context” (96).

In chapter 4 Janz reflects on Odera Oruka’s sage philosophy project. Charging that while the approach seems to solve the paradox of African philosophy by appealing to universal principles of reason while exploring the context of African lived experience, Janz argues that Oruka imports Western philosophical ideas to a large extent, mostly unacknowledged. While the method first looks promising by focusing on conversation between the sage and the interviewer (an academically trained philosopher), where the two cooperatively work toward truth, it often sounds nevertheless like it is the academic philosopher who will focus upon and make manifest latent reasoning in the sage’s conversation. Janz notes that it is past outmoded ethnographies that turned Africans into objects of others’ studies. Janz therefore prefers open-ended conversation.

In chapter 5, Janz says that he wants to “unseat” culture “from its presumed role as guarantor of the Africanity of African philosophy” (123). Why do some consider Western-trained African academics as “unpure,” as tainted by Western philosophy? Janz
agrees with Kwame Gyekye, who explains that no one can claim to have found a “pure” tradition, since all traditions are influenced by other cultures. Janz explores the difficult arguments surrounding “cultural universals” in the discussions of Kwasi Wiredu and Odera Oruka. He finds the debate problematic on many levels: the nature of a universal is unclear, and it is not clear why it should be held on the level of culture. Janz also thinks that Wittgenstein pointed out the problems of presuming we use abstract terms with constant meanings across different domains. Janz thinks that Husserl and Brentano clearly demonstrated that there is no such thing as a universal understood objectively as outside of the subject–object relationship. Consciousness is shaped by our intentionality; all experience has both subject and object poles. Janz is willing to accept a version of universals that he finds hinted at in the writings of Gyekye, where the universal is a goal of thought, arising through human interaction and earned, as it were, through these common efforts over time. But in the meantime, Janz thinks that terms like logic, science, humaneness, and intuition (which Oruka and Wiredu identify as cultural universals) do not transcend culture but find their meanings within culture. At the heart of the Wiredu–Oruka dialogue about cultural universals is the desire to communicate accurately across cultures and connect with dialogue partners. Janz suggests that paying attention to the philosophy of listening (as explicated in the work of Gemma Corradi Fiumara) will help achieve this goal.

Janz explores the complications of philosophy’s relation to language further in his chapter six. Here he also tackles whether proverbs are a good source for discovering African philosophy. In chapter 7 Janz tackles the perennial topic, is philosophy practical? Hountondji and others suggest that if philosophy cannot be tied directly to the material betterment of life in Africa, then it is useless – they therefore advocate a kind of philosophy linked to scientific reasoning. Janz counters that an emancipatory project should not tie itself to so narrow an Enlightenment ideal. Surveying what Oruka, Irele, Bodunrin, and Ngugi wa Thiong’o have to say on the relationship between ideas and action, Janz puts forward his own view that philosophers should relate to their communities and help them by showing them what their thought-lives are like, using the conceptual tools of philosophy. Janz credits sage philosophy with putting front-center the goal of connecting sage and professional philosopher to concern for the health of their community.

Janz concludes his book by humbly suggesting that his own work was largely a negative project, clearing the field from mistaken ideas of what it would mean to philosophize in Africa, so that others in an African place can step forward and do the work that Janz has suggested needs to be done. Noting that he is a non-African and that issues of legitimacy and voice are real and sensitive topics, he nevertheless insists that the field of African philosophy should not be hermetically sealed; he suggests that “Hermeneutics of suspicion and trust must operate simultaneously,” even if this means that his motives will be questioned by other readers. Addressing the topic of the relation of “self” and “other,” he notes that African philosophy has particularly been focused on questions of alterity. There are many “others,” as Theophilus Okere notes: the neo-colonial other, the other of one’s own tradition, or other cultures. While the dominating other is often focused upon as a negative experience, as Janz explains, “The other serves the function of making oneself coherent, either by mirroring or alienating, and serves as the locus of complexity in any narrative of coherence” (241). Janz emphasizes active listening, in an oral situation that connects one to place, before any speaking. Certainly Janz has spent many years listening to African voices, often orally/audibly in African places, as well as through voluminous reading, and after doing so he is now speaking to us in this book. We can only gain by listening to him, and responding to his challenge to keep questioning and creatively
thinking in response to our increased awareness of the meanings embedded in the various and current African places.

Gail Presbey
University of Detroit Mercy, Detroit, Michigan
presbegm@udmercy.edu
© 2012, Gail Presbey

In the Twilight of the Revolution: The Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (South Africa) 1959–1994, by Kwandiwe Kondlo, Basel, Switzerland: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2010, xiv + 340 pp.

In the Twilight of the Revolution is a comprehensive history of the Pan Africanist Congress of South Africa (or Azania), from its beginning as a breakaway from the African National Congress in 1959 until the first universal suffrage election in South Africa in 1994. The author, Kwandiwe Kondlo, was well placed to write such a history: as the nephew of Gerald Kondlo, the first leader of the PAC’s military wing, the Azanian People’s Liberation Army, he was able to interview numerous PAC members and leaders, in addition to consulting public and private archives to develop a unique perspective on the occasionally glorious but often stormy history of this less successful party to the anti-apartheid movement.

Despite Kondlo’s family connections, he does not idealize the PAC. In the author’s introduction, he states that he wants to explain how and why the PAC was chronically unable to translate its militant anti-apartheid rhetoric into a sustained challenge to the apartheid state. His analysis begins during the crucial years after the banning of the organization inside South Africa in 1960 when the PAC moved initially to Basutoland (Lesotho) and then to Tanzania.

During the first two years of exile the PAC was rocked by internal conflicts which set the tone for much of the organization’s life in exile. With most of its founding leadership imprisoned, the PAC’s fiery new leader, Potlako Leballo, pursued an authoritarian leadership style. He successfully established a home-base in exile for the PAC and initiated international diplomatic relations; but Leballo castigated PAC members who disagreed with him, and often charged that they were working clandestinely with the apartheid state to infiltrate the organization. Kondlo categorizes this tendency as “internal enemy syndrome”: a paranoia born out of the early days of exile when distrust and secrecy may have been good policy, but which then became ingrained into the organizational bones of the PAC and ultimately crippled its ability to develop into a broad-based organization with a deep and experienced leadership.

Other conflicts arose over disbursement of funds, the management of PAC training camps, and the organization’s military strategy and ideology. The PAC received monetary and diplomatic support from many nations as well as from the Organization of African Unity. But there were few rules and no accountability for spending, a fact that generated concern and resentment within the organization and among donors. Leaders dismissed these concerns, but donors and governments began restricting their aid and trying to micro-manage its use, thus reducing the PAC’s independence of action.

Training camps were managed haphazardly, and the recruits living in them often had to fend for themselves as they were chronically short of supplies. In the one Tanzanian
camp for which Kondlo has solid evidence, Ruvu Camp, the inhabitants divided into factions partly based on the time period in which they had joined the organization, and partly based on “tribal sentiments,” to use Kondlo’s phrase. People cultivated “tribal sentiments” to build constituencies inside the camp, and these factions sometimes erupted in assaults and other disciplinary problems. Top PAC leaders were reluctant to confront factionalism head-on because acknowledging the existence of tribal identities might have been seen as “counter-revolutionary.” This reluctance arose from their tendency to be consumed with their own careers rather than with the lives of the rank-and-file, and with the pursuit of ideological purity rather than with the development of a pragmatic military or political strategy. It was also hypocritical, as leaders openly denied the salience of ethnic or tribal networks, but covertly used these networks to bolster their own positions.

Kondlo’s most significant contribution may be his discussion of how and why the PAC was so poorly prepared for operating inside South Africa after President de Klerk unbanned the organization, along with the much better prepared ANC, in 1990. For the PAC, unlike the ANC, violence had always been more than just a tactic: the PAC had been founded on the idea that violent struggle was the only legitimate channel for African anger and the only way to unseat the apartheid state. By 1988 PAC leaders were aware that negotiations were a possibility but tended to dismiss any thought of a negotiated transition. Leaders criticized African states that were pushing negotiations, suggesting that those states had been intimidated by Pretoria’s military might.

The tide was running against the PAC, however, and it was too organizationally weak to withstand it. In 1990 the OAU told the PAC to “stop the war talk” and prepare itself for negotiations, a sentiment echoed by Robert Mugabe’s ZANU-PF government, demonstrating just how diplomatically isolated the PAC had become (260). The PAC persisted, however, and officially stated that the violent struggle should be intensified rather than suspended. But there was disagreement within the leadership as some argued that the unbanning offered a real opportunity to work openly inside South Africa. Ultimately, the PAC did join the negotiations, but not until 1993, and then only because its continued use of violence had alienated it from various elements of civil society and the leadership felt the need to repair these relations. The wavering of the PAC’s position only served to further undermine its support within South Africa, however, and its poor showing in the 1994 election left it unable to push its more radical policy ideas or to challenge the ANC’s burgeoning popularity. Despite growing dissatisfaction with the ANC government, particularly in the past decade, the PAC has been unable to resurrect itself organizationally into a political party with a substantial national constituency.

In the introduction to the book, Kondlo suggests that the collapse of the PAC was a major reason for the lack of credible political alternatives to the ANC in the post-1994 period. He does not return to discuss this point extensively in the conclusion, and that is too bad, because such a discussion might have pushed this book to the next level and given it a much broader readership. Overall, though, this is a very strong and informative analysis of the brief rise and the long fall of the PAC, an organization whose militancy and ideological clarity often excited the most radical elements of the anti-apartheid movement, but whose basic lack of pragmatism and whose adherence to violence as an ideological touchstone left it ill-prepared to adapt to a post-apartheid South Africa.

Sean Redding

Department of History, Amherst College, Amherst, Massachusetts
sredding@amherst.edu
© 2012, Sean Redding
Political Spiritualities: The Pentecostal Revolution in Nigeria, by Ruth Marshall, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009, x + 349 pp.

This book is significant because it is the first to provide an understanding of the explosion of Pentecostalism in Nigeria, its complex political productivity, and its project of redemption in the context of crises in the Nigerian state from the political science perspective.

Although the chapters seem disconnected, the following major themes and issues are discussed. First, because the boundaries of religion in Africa perpetually flow into other domains including the political, the author rejects the Western approach of studying religion and politics through formal religious institutions. The new approach proposed enables the understanding of: the circulation of religious doctrines; various practices such as preaching, witness, testimonies, prayers, and prophesies; and material culture. These facts reflect on the power relations working within and outside the community of charismatic believers and incorporating relations with the Nigerian state. This approach is a major strength of the book.

Second, the plausibility and pertinence of Charismatic Christianity (the author prefers Born Again Christianity) since its emergence in the 1970s arose because the new religion has represented itself as a form of rupture from the past working towards a program of personal and collective regeneration that is engaged in a battle or “spiritual warfare” to redeem the corrupt Nigerian society. Conversion (i.e. becoming born again) becomes a rupture, followed by a learning process involving ritual practices that enables personal transformation. The Pentecostal project of conversion further determines how institutions are organized, “behavior regulated, narratives structured, an order of knowledge and the rules of its verification determined, authority established, spaces laid out” (45).

Third, against the background of the predatory nature of national politics, characterized by endemic corruption, persistent conflicts, and insecurity, the prevalence of confrontational relations, and instances of domination, Charismatics in the 1980s began to create a new realm of evil occult powers in the society. Hence, the engagement with the demonic through series of prayers termed “spiritual warfare” is central to the Pentecostal program of redemption and salvation (8).

Fourth, the born again experience of the individual constitutes “political spirituality” because the new faith emphasizes individual moral conduct, often reinforced by “assiduous Bible study, permanent self-examination and public witness” (12), which provides a critique of the corrupt political space. The new religion also fosters an agenda of righteousness and self-discipline that it hopes will bring redemption to the ailing nation. The community of believers further provides protection and “a vision of citizenship in which the moral government of the self is linked to the power to influence the conduct of others” (125).

Fifth, the political theology of Charismatics has been diffused and sporadic. In the 1970s, Charismatics were apolitical and considered the political sphere as a trapping of Satan, but in the 1990s a new understanding emerged as Charismatics began to claim a redemptive role in the political future of the nation. Hence, the program of conversion tries to secure connections between righteousness and authority and to stage a conscious engagement with the demonic in the public sphere in order to rescue the country. The contest with Islam for the public space was also considered spiritual warfare for the soul of the country, since the introduction of the Sharia in Northern Nigeria from 1999 was seen as an Islamization agenda. Consequently, some Charismatics believe that the conversion of individuals who take up their civic responsibilities will usher in a government of righteousness in the country. Thus, they continue to refer to the urgency of evangelism.
The author concludes that Born Again Christianity and its messianic action towards politics has failed to redeem the Nigerian past, just as it has failed to secure promises of security, mastery, and justice for the present (243).

Strangely, the historical narrative of nineteenth-century Protestant Christianity in the book that forms the background to the emergence of the Charismatic movements is disjointed. Some familiarity with the history of Nigerian Christianity is needed to fully understand the narrative. Nor does the book provide a map of Nigeria showing the towns mentioned therein.

Although the book is rich in its analysis of the nature of Nigerian political space, it does not depict any single instance of positive political development within the period of study. Moreover, the study generalizes about the Nigerian Charismatic movements from a few case studies of churches based in Lagos, despite the variety of Charismatic churches.

The author also attempts to link the effervescence of the Nigerian Charismatic movements to American Pentecostalism without providing the evidence. There are incorrect historical facts, which cannot and should not be glossed over. The major ones are:

- The Scripture Union was founded in 1911 (69). The fact is that it was founded in England in 1867 and introduced to Nigeria in 1886.
- Deeper Christian Life Ministries is the parent organization and the registered name, while Deeper Life Bible Church is the church arm that was created in 1982 (69–70).
- The Apostolic Church was established in Nigeria in the late 1920s (68). The fact is that it was established in Nigeria in 1930.
- The Holy Ghost Camp was established in 1991 (75). The facts are that the Redemption Camp of the Redeemed Christian Church of God was established in 1985, while the Holy Ghost Night, an all-night service of prayers and healing, was established in 1991.

Nevertheless, the book has made its mark as an important interpretative account of Pentecostalism in Nigeria. The use of sources in French is novel and constitutes strength of scholarship. The book deserves to be read by scholars interested in religion and politics in Africa, and particularly in contemporary religious change in Nigeria.

Matthews A. Ojo
Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria
matthews_ojo@yahoo.com
© 2012, Matthews A. Ojo

Mort et dynamiques sociales au Katanga (République démocratique du Congo). Cahiers africains - Afrika Studies 78, by Joël Noret and Pierre Petit, Tervuren, Belgium: Musée royal de l’Afrique centrale/Koninklijk Museum voor Midden-Afrika, and Paris: Harmattan, 2011, 159 pp.

The vast land now known as the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has been riven for decades, its government so enfeebled, its strife so dire, and its horrific violence so widespread that the place lends itself to ever-more-sardonic hyperbole. As a state, the DRC is “clinically dead” (11), yet suffering continues in what many deem the worst genocide since the Holocaust. Massive executions are matched by untold numbers of
grievously wounded in body and soul, with rape a strategy of battle. Bloody conflict is stoked by minerals critical to bourgeois life elsewhere in the world (think iPhone™), and venality knows no bounds. Famines rage, epidemics surge. Such is the collective pain that social critic Jean-Pierre Jacquemin wonders if the term “requiem” might be redirected to Congolese life, and anthropologist Filip De Boeck writes of the “zombification” of Kinshasa, where death occupies and preoccupies (ibid.). Any divide between living and dead is precariously permeable in the DRC, and mourning has lost its sense of soothing.

The DRC is too sprawling to allow any such assessment to account for all people in all places at all times, of course. New “normals” are constantly determined by resilient people across the country, and stability exists, at least for some, some of the time. Without denying the fearful misery that has long engulfed the DRC, anthropologists Joël Noret and Pierre Petit seek to understand what death can mean today to the particular communities of southeastern DRC collectively known as “Luba.” Their brief monograph concerns Luba life in Lubumbashi, the Copper Belt capital now humbled by nearly complete deindustrialization. Petit’s earlier doctoral research among rural Luba informs the study. While largely descriptive, the book includes consideration of theoretical positions posited by expatriate observers of death, mortuary rituals, and regeneration in African and other societies. In comparing earlier rural with contemporary urban realities among Luba, Noret and Petit find that funerals – and especially as increasingly influenced by Evangelical practice in and around Lubumbashi – emphasize the singularity of loss in an individual’s death as much or more than ritualized processes of collective grief and community regeneration (15–18).

A first, all-too-brief section presents Pierre Petit’s research on Luba mourning rituals from his own field studies complemented by archival materials. Included are marvelous resources like Van Avermaet and Mbuya’s Dictionnaire Kiluba-Français (1954) with its exegetical explanations that provide a sense of words in cultural context, and the compelling works of Jacques Theuws such as “Naître et mourir dans le rituel luba” (1960) and “Le Styx ambigu” (1968). Heartfelt threnodies are cited as are rousing funeral oratories, leaving readers to wish they had known these departed persons so obviously beloved (30–32). Prohibitions for widow and widower (bupyani) are outlined, as are responsibilities vis-à-vis the defunct and his or her family as loss is accommodated and new roles are assumed to resituate the surviving spouse in networks of lineage and clan.

The rest of the book is given to death and mourning in contemporary Lubumbashi, based on Pierre Petit’s long experience directing the Observatoire du changement urbain that he founded there in 2000, and the occasional research of Joël Noret, whose more enduring research concerns funeral rituals in the Republic of Benin. Despite the demise of the city’s mining industry and its related middle class, Lubumbashi remains home to a great many for whom village life is no longer pertinent, or at least as it once was. As opposed to many places in Africa where city-dwellers are buried in their natal lands, “in Lubumbashi one buries in the city, and massively” (47). Because industry and its wages are moribund, Lubumbashi can seem a city of the dead and dying; yet life goes on through new modes of organization and fulfillment. The most significant of these is Evangelical Christianity. Pentecostal pastors are now locked in mortal combat with forces of evil, confronted in part by earlier social paradigms but in far less nuanced ways than how the ambiguities of sorcery are still understood in rural regions. Contemporary urban realities such as lack of salaried labor are to be accommodated, as must HIV/AIDS, treated as an illness through Western biomedicine but ascribed to the maliciousness of one’s fellows (50–51). Urban facilities like morgues and cemeteries come into play, and rituals concerning widows and widowers are taking new forms. In these respects, the book’s most
significant chapter is the last, concerning “the religious refashioning of the place of the
dead” (111–136). Here again, Petit’s rural research is the backdrop for analysis of life in
Lubumbashi as increasingly influenced by Pentecostalism.

With some two million Congolese calling themselves or being called “Luba,” the
authors wisely note that “to speak of mourning in Luba country as though it were an
entirely homogenous phenomenon is abusive, to a certain degree, given how diverse
practices and ritual traditions are in this region” (22); and indeed, Pierre Petit has made
valuable contributions to our understanding of the ethnic complexities of “Luba” in his
earlier writings. Despite such a processual sense of social identity, the authors fall back on
the flattening generalities of anthropological praxis with very few exegeses and references
to particular performance events that would permit readers to grasp how the dramas of
bereavement are negotiated every step of the way. Mort et dynamiques sociales is more a
useful survey of earlier literature and present-day practice than the promised consideration
of “social dynamics,” then. One also wonders why European publishers so frequently
desire to provide readers with indexes; this book would be far more useful were it to
possess one. Still, Petit and Noret have made a valuable contribution to postcolonial
literature, and their book is recommended for any wishing to explore the ways that, in a
still-great African city, death is not left to the dying.

Allen F. Roberts
University of California, Los Angeles
aroberts@arts.ucla.edu
© 2012, Allen F. Roberts

Masked Raiders: Irish Banditry in Southern Africa 1880–1899, by Charles van
Onselen, Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2010, 292 pp.

The foremost social historian of the early Witwatersrand returns to the terrain he mined
thirty years ago to produce the classic two-volume Studies in the Social and Economic
History of the Witwatersrand, 1886–1914 (subsequently republished in a single volume as
New Babylon, New Nineveh: Everyday Life on the Witwatersrand, 1886–1914, Cape
Town: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2001). Here he delves into the experiences of the “Irish
Brigade,” a group of loosely associated white male migrants and immigrants, primarily of
Irish extraction, who lived outside the law. Although some were common criminals and
even sociopaths, van Onselen frames most of these outlaws as politically motivated to the
extent that they rebelled against state and capitalist mining houses’ neglect and exploitation
of white working folk. Moreover, many had clear Irish Republican sympathies and a few
may have been active in the nationalist cause. The men under discussion engaged in a wide
assortment of criminal activities including highway and bank robbery, confidence scams,
safe-cracking, and the theft of gold amalgam, mainly on the Rand but occasionally as far
afeld as Mozambique and Zimbabwe.

Masked Bandits is a multi-layered text. On the surface it is first and foremost a story of
Irish desperados who, for two decades, used southern Africa as a criminal playground.
Many of them deserters from the British army, the adventures of these larger than life
characters are rich material in the hands of a talented storyteller. We have a legendary one-
armed killer, blood feuds, jailbreaks, relentless detectives, and thrilling horse chases
across the veld. However, these exploits also provide a vehicle for probing the political,
economic, racial, gendered and ethnic turmoil that characterized a rapidly transforming South African society. Van Onselen explores the forces that produced this particular class of criminals and reflects on the ways in which their actions shaped their surroundings.

The depredations of Irish bandits in the South African Republic (ZAR) had definite, if unintended, political implications. When two highwaymen convicted of robbery and attempted murder were sentenced to death by the Kruger government in 1891, the English media and sections of the English-speaking public throughout South Africa united in protest. Critics used what they labeled a draconian penalty as evidence of the ZAR’s antiquated justice system and the critique was extended to suggest “that the time had come for a united ‘South Africa’ governed by a single British legal system” (154). The pressure became so intense that the authorities commuted the sentences to life imprisonment. It is not surprising that ZAR officials took a dim view of white gangsters. The economic downturn of 1890–92 on the Rand “precipitated a major outbreak in organized crime by whites along the length of the Reef” (165). The government, which until recently had presided over a primarily rural population and an agricultural economy, was overwhelmed by the criminal onslaught that accompanied massive industrialization and economic depression. Neither law enforcement nor the penal system was equipped to handle this scale of criminality. The authorities often struggled to bring well-known gangsters to book and even when they did had an even more difficult time preventing their escape from custody. Van Onselen asks readers to consider whether the ZAR’s failure to quell brigandage may have influenced the decision to mount the spectacularly disastrous Jameson Raid of 1895. He argues that the actions of the Irish Brigade in particular could well have signaled the ZAR’s vulnerability to Rhodes, Jameson, and others responsible for the plan to overthrow Kruger’s government.

Through its focus on white criminals Masked Bandits reinforces a well-documented theme in the history of South African criminality. Those in power – successive white governments and the white public – were essentially indifferent to violent crime experienced by the black population. Whereas a few of the Irish Brigade achieved celebrity status and were much discussed in the media and in popular (white) discourse, there was no such attention directed towards black criminals. Nor was it conceivable that the white media and public would agitate for clemency on behalf of black criminals sentenced to death as they did for white highwaymen. Van Onselen makes a case that at least some of his subjects were considered criminal heroes and even displayed traces of social banditry, but the very traits which were considered admirable in white brigands – chivalry, courage, daring, and loyalty – were denied to black criminals or deemed subversive to the racial order. There was nothing for whites to celebrate in black criminality. It was feared when whites were seen as threatened and largely ignored when blacks were the victims.

Women are largely absent from the pages of this book other than as sisters, mothers, or molls. Many of the Irish Brigade avoided the entanglements of married life and instead favored more informal liaisons. The gendered dimension of this study probes the masculine values of frontier mining societies and the ways in which the Irish Brigade exemplified a hard masculine code that resonated with much of the white working class. In spite of the fear their frequent use of violence inspired, the bandits’ defiance of authorities and masculine flair also incited admiration.

Van Onselen has written a riveting book and his storytelling abilities do justice to the outlaws he clearly admires. Many of his interpretations are provocative and some readers may take issue with the degree of speculation in which the author indulges. For example, when establishing possible connections between the criminal Irish Brigade and the Irish unit of the same name that fought on the side of the Boers in the South African War, van
Onselen laments the paucity of hard evidence and admits that “the temptation to speculate is utterly irresistible” (220). He yields to such temptation in a number of instances throughout the book but is always frank about the evidentiary base from which he is working. The author urges a new generation of researchers to complicate the current historiography of South Africa’s frontier societies by investigating the political and social importance of bandit groups, both black and white. This compelling work provides a solid foundation upon which further studies can build.

Gary Kynoch
Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia
gkynoch@dal.ca
© 2012, Gary Kynoch

Selecting Immigrants: National Identity and South Africa’s Immigration Policies, 1910-2008, by Sally Peberdy, Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2009, xi + 329pp.

It is certainly true that a nation-state reveals much about itself in its immigration policy. As Peberdy tells us in this book, “Selection criteria and immigration policies starkly reveal the powerful myth making of nation states and their fears that non-members or non-citizens have the potential to contaminate the nation” (2). After reading these words two pages into the book, I expected that the rest of it would merely amplify what seemed to be the main theme in twentieth-century South African history: the entrenchment of white supremacy, with an Afrikaner bias. Indeed, the parallels between domestic policy and immigration policy seemed so obvious that I anticipated that Peberdy’s book would be rather a footnote to the standard surveys of modern South Africa which have appeared in the past two decades. The prominence of conventional sources such as state archives and the ponderous writing style confirmed me in the impression that this book would be safe, sound, but not scintillating reading. My impression was misleading. Peberdy’s story is familiar to a point, but it also conveys disquieting insights, which undermine many standard assumptions about not only the past immigration policies of the Union and Republic before 1994, but also about the new regime.

When the Union of South Africa was created in 1910, the Afrikaner-dominated South African Party formed the new state’s first government. Under the leadership of Louis Botha and J.C. Smuts, the new Union placed a priority on reconciling “Boer” and “Briton” to secure South Africa as a “white man’s land.” This entailed not only the continued subordination of the indigenous black population, but also the careful control of black migratory laborers. The latter end was effected by the 1913 Immigrants Regulation Act, the restrictive clauses of which, according to Peberdy, “entrenched the migrant labour system in South Africa’s legal framework” (50).

There was more, of course, to South Africa’s social engineering than the control of the black majority. As the author demonstrates early in the book, South Africa’s immigration policy in the twentieth century sought not only to control African entry but also to restrict those non-Africans whose presence in the privileged (white) tier of society would compromise white supremacy. Hence, the state aimed to limit the immigration of British Indians before the First World War and European Jews between the world wars. As merchants, professionals, or – in the case of the latter – financiers, both groups were seen as occupying a social space reserved for whites of a particular type, which included neither
Indians nor Jews. Because Britain would not countenance explicit racial or ethnic
prohibition, South Africa could not, as a Commonwealth dominion, exclude Indians or Jews
by name. The state managed, however, to achieve its objective by deploying administrative
regulations which barred undesirables on non-racial grounds such as disease or failure to
assimilate. The heated discussion about Indian immigration that accompanied the
introduction of the Immigrants Regulation Bill was “shot through with metaphors of
disease, degeneration, invasion, and contamination” (50).

Slightly over a decade later, the same measure and the same rhetoric (albeit with a
more pronounced eugenicist twist) was used against Jewish immigrants, whom South
African authorities saw “not just as a threat to the physical bodies of the white population,
but as potential contaminators of the body of the nation itself. For the state, they were not
the right kind of white- not ‘white like us’” (82).

While confirming that all South African governments since Union have sought to
restrict immigration, Peberdy discerns the emergence in 1948 of a significant difference
between the national vision of Smuts’s United Party and that of Malan’s National Party.
To Smuts, the Union needed more white immigrants to bolster the European element
against the black majority, and it needed skilled workers – hence, Smuts’s encouragement
of British immigration (90–91).

Malan’s nationalism (and that of his National Party) was more exclusive and akin to the
German notion of “blood and volk”. It was framed, moreover, in spiritual terms. Although
the notion of race was central to the Nationalists’ vision of the South African nation, its
conception of race was not merely physical but metaphysical. “State officials . . . referred
to the potential of immigrants to contaminate or corrupt the ‘soul’ of the nation, its
cracter and spiritual development” (106). Imputing to South Africa a divine mission (and
a Protestant one), the National Party held up as its goal the conversion of South Africa from
a British dominion to an Afrikaner Republic. In accordance with this national ideal, Malan
would only accept those European immigrants who considered themselves Afrikaners. By
implication, the numerical strength of the white population was far less important to the
Nationalists than the character of the white elite. What is especially surprising is Peberdy’s
revelation that after 1960 the National Party came to adopt the view that Afrikaners were
not created at birth. “The attempt to make Afrikaners out of immigrants reflects the shift in
the national vision and identity of the state . . . . As the republic divested itself of British
influence, South Africans and Afrikaners were no longer just born; they could be made, as
all would have allegiance to the same state with the same aim” (134).

This is certainly a significant and astute point. It qualifies the racist element in
Afrikaner nationalism. It reminds us too that many racist theories stopped short of complete
biological determinism. Thus, at the beginning of the twentieth century, that self-
proclaimed British race patriot, Alfred Milner, reached, from a very different perspective,
precisely the same conclusion that the Afrikaner rulers articulated over sixty years later:
“An isolated British farmer here and there amidst community is no use – he ends by
becoming an ultra Afrikaner” (Milner to Chamberlain, 9 May 1900, in 

The denouement of Peberdy’s work comes in her discussion of contemporary
“democratic South Africa.” Despite their avowed commitment to human rights, the new
rulers of South Africa have, in Peberdy’s view, pursued an immigration policy as
restrictive as that of previous governments. Also worrying is the widespread popular
support that a wave of violent xenophobic attacks garnered in 2008. The Immigration Act
passed by South Africa in 2002 and amended in 2004 remains “largely exclusionary”
(139). Moreover, the mechanisms used to control migrants are reminiscent of the apartheid
era. The state regularly conducts stop-and-search operations to identify undocumented migrants — rather like the old pass laws (153). Now, however, the state deploys a new computerized Movement Control System (147). What Peberdy finds especially haunting are the rationales for exclusion. First, it is claimed that migrants pose a “serious threat to South Africa’s already overburdened resources” (160). Second, there is the fear that migrants will bring in disease and crime (161). Hence, we see again the metaphor of the state as body and immigrants as parasites or contaminants. Finally, there is the paradoxical legacy of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which Peberdy explains nicely:

The repeated invocation of a shared history by the Constitution and the TRC report and the embracing of the nation’s diverse population — which includes all citizens, that is the Afrikaner, the English, the coloured, the Indian, the black — suggest that South African national identity includes all citizens with their shared memory of the past. But it also seeks to ‘protect’ South Africa’s new nation-building project and identity from incursions by non-citizens who stand outside this memory. (169)

All this leads Peberdy to her ironic conclusion that “immigration policy and practices indicate that the post-1994 state may be more hostile to immigration and immigrants than its immediate predecessor” (168–69).

The author’s research is meticulous and thorough. The thirty pages of immigration statistics will furnish a fruitful research base for future scholars. Moreover, her material is fresh, much of it having been just recently released. To be sure, government archives and conventional sources suffuse the work, but this would seem appropriate, given the nature of her topic. The author herself confesses that, “by focusing on official discourses around immigration, this book has in some ways reproduced the gendered construction of the category of immigrant by the South African state” (180). Her main purpose in writing the book, however, was to fill the gaps in the official story, thus leaving an open field for historians of race, gender, and other aspects of society and culture. Her hope, as she explains in her epilogue, is that her work will encourage others to investigate less conventional topics and to explore less official sources.

This is a solid book, perhaps a stolid one, but it is also an eye-opener that breaks new ground. Its conventionality gives it an authority which self-proclaimed fresh approaches often lack.

David E. Torrance
Mount Allison University, Sackville, New Brunswick
dtorrance@mta.ca
© 2012, David E. Torrance

Islamization from Below: The Making of Muslim Communities in Rural French Sudan, 1880–1960, by Brian J. Peterson, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011, xiv + 319 pp.

Brian Peterson, the author of the book reviewed here, sketches an accurate assessment when he states that there is not enough attention given to the subject of Islamization in the general field of Islamic history. However, for those trained in Islamic history who are introduced to the field of Islam in Africa, the emphasis on Islamization as a theme can be frustrating. But the frustration does not stem from exposure to this theme as a recurrent one in the literature on Islam in Africa but rather from the shallow and fragmented analysis that
has marked most of the work on the subject, especially earlier works. Bracketed between identifying the “agents” and defining the “stages,” analyses of movements of conversion to Islam in Africa lacked depth and any comprehensive analysis. Patchy approaches to Islamization in Africa pertained mostly to the colonial period. Academic interest in this topic attempted to solve what was regarded as a puzzle, given that conversion to Islam in Africa accelerated under colonial rule. The French Sudan in particular was a theatre of these movements of mass conversion.

The past two decades have witnessed the publication of groundbreaking analyses of Islam and Muslims in the French Sudan. While the discussion of Islamization remained peripheral to the overall framework of analysis, it allowed for a better understanding of the context of Islamization. And yet, the theme remained confined within the borders of Sufi orders, their hierarchies and their machinations. Peterson’s book, *Islamization from Below*, is not merely another welcome addition to a growing body of insightful and interesting literature on the French Sudan. It is a unique one that successfully makes Islamization the central theme and does so with an innovative approach that breaks the mold into which the subject had been contained and by which it had been shaped. This book, for a change, is not about Sufi leaders, traders and state builders; it is indeed a view from “below,” examining “the grass-roots spread of Islam among rural peoples” (6). By focusing on the experiences of refugees and ex-slaves in the rural colonial district of Buguni (in modern-day Mali), Peterson links Islamization to a broad set of ecological, economic, social, and political factors that impacted the daily life of rural inhabitants. Part of that impact was immediate but part was incremental. Thus, the author, following those changes over the span of eighty years, also provides an inter-generational perspective. He describes Islamization not as a conversion movement per se but as a gradual process based “on practice rather than cosmology” (7) and characterized by “forms of cultural translation and identity negotiations within wider social fields” (13). The sources for this analysis are derived from both archival material and oral accounts.

The book is divided into an introduction, seven chapters and a conclusion, all elegantly written in an accessible language and each covering a period of time between the establishment of the Samorian wars and 1960, while retaining a thematic coherence throughout the book. In chapter 1, borrowing Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of habitus, the author maps out the religious habitus of southern Mali that preceded the founding of the Samorian state. He follows it by a concise account of Samori’s legacy in the region. Chapter 2 follows the experiences of the refugees returning to Buguni after the collapse of the Samorian order and the establishment of the French colonial one. The author skillfully ties those experiences to ecological and social developments as well as to a new political economy emerging in the early phase of colonialism. Both chapters pave the way for the discussion in chapter 3 of the development of the early Muslim community in Buguni between 1905 and 1914, a community consisting of freed slaves who transplanted with them Muslim rituals as well as new agricultural practices, and the seeds for social change in the district.

Chapter 4 and 5 cover the material and political changes from the interwar period until the 1950s, focusing on colonial policies and “on how people coped with the everyday demands of colonialism” (123). The author links colonial political and economic policies to social shifts and changes among the rural communities in Buguni, prominent among them the weakening and eventual disintegration of chieftaincy. Labor migration was a crucial effect of those policies, altering inter-generational relationships and marriage practices, and developing “a new ethos of agrarian individualism” (183).
The relevance of these chapters to the subject of Islamization is not self-evident but can, rather, be assumed by the reader. However, Peterson adeptly integrates the social transformations mapped out in the two previous chapters into chapters 6 and 7, where he ties migration and individualism to transformations, both private and public, in the religious landscape. A particularly interesting point raised is the significance of declaring religious identity during the colonial census.

An obvious shortfall in the chapters covering the post World War II era is the failure to provide enough context and explanation of the identity, ideologies, and policies of the Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (RDA) and the Parti Progressiste Soudanais (PSP). Only brief information is provided about the two parties, not enough to explain their relevance and importance, especially those of the RDA, to the politics of Islam and Muslim identity after World War II.

This minor criticism notwithstanding, *Islamization from Below* is a remarkable work that fills a big gap in the literature on Islam in West Africa. Equally significant is its relevance that reaches beyond the field of Islam in West Africa or even continental Africa. Scholars interested in patterns and phenomena of Islamization elsewhere would find this work, with its methodological originality and theoretical sophistication, most insightful. While this study has its own specific context, it nevertheless offers historians interested in Islamization some new analytical and methodological tools, or at least it inspires them to consider new approaches to the topic.

Amal Ghazal

*Dalhousie University, Halifax, Canada*

amal.ghazal@dal.ca

© 2012, Amal Ghazal

---

**Theory of African Music, Volume 1**, by Gerhard Kubik, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994, 464 pp. 1 CD and **Theory of African Music, Volume 2**, by Gerhard Kubik, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010, viii + 359 pp., 1 CD.

Gerhard Kubik occupe indiscutablement une place à part dans le monde de l’ethnomusicologie. Parti découvrir les musiques africaines à 25 ans, après une expérience de musicien de jazz dans son Autriche natale et des études interrompues à l’université de Vienne (qu’il conclura cependant par une thèse de doctorat soutenue en 1971), il a multiplié les recherches sur les sujets et les terrains les plus divers, accumulant une masse considérable d’enregistrements audio, de photographies, de films et de vidéos (en grande partie déposés à la Phonogrammarchiv de Vienne) et produisant des centaines de textes. Ces deux volumes ne regroupent donc qu’une infime partie de ses travaux (dont un bon nombre est cité dans les bibliographies) mais en présentent un échantillon représentatif. Ils ont été conçus comme un *reader* s’attachant davantage, en dépit du titre, à fournir des exemples concrets de méthodes d’investigation qu’à proposer une “théorie” de la musique africaine.

Le premier volume s’ouvre sur la relation, et l’analyse, de l’expérience quasi initiatique qu’il connut lorsqu’il arriva en Ouganda en 1959 et entreprit d’apprendre à jouer de certains xylophones utilisés par les orchestres de cour du Kabaka du Buganda. Il se poursuit avec l’analyse comparée du chant polyphonique en Afrique centrale, orientale et australe. Il revient sur les xylophones ganda pour examiner de plus près les règles
gouvernant les compositions qu’ils jouent, puis se clôt sur des réflexions à propos des relations entre mouvement et son dans l’Angola oriental.

Le second volume est présenté comme plus particulièrement centré sur la créativité de l’esprit musical; il traite du rythme, des perceptions auditives, des relations entre temps et espace en Angola oriental et propose deux études de cas: sur les chantefables yoruba et la famille musicale malawâite des Kachamba, à laquelle l’auteur a été très étroitement associé (Kubik, Gerhard. 1974. *The Kachamba Brothers’ Band: A Study of Neo-Traditional Music in Malawi*. Lusaka: University of Zambia, Institute for African Studies (Zambian Papers 9). Le premier volume avait déjà été publié en 1994 et contient des textes écrits entre le début des années 1960 et le début des années 1990. Le second aurait dû paraître dans la foulée du premier mais une série de problèmes en a retardé la publication jusqu’en 2010. La plupart des textes qu’il contient étaient finis en 1988 et avaient été révisés en 1994; ils n’ont pas été revus ni mis à jour depuis.

Le caractère hétéroclite de cette sélection de textes rend assez bien compte des approches que Gerhard Kubik a adoptées face aux musiques africaines. Au départ musicien plus que musicologue ou anthropologue, il a été guidé par un désir très fort de comprendre les musiques d’Afrique, si fort qu’il n’hésita pas à se rendre en Ouganda, depuis Vienne, à pied et en auto-stop avec seulement quatre-vingt livres sterling en poche. Cinq ans plus tard, en 1964, c’est à vélosolex qu’il traversa le nord de l’Afrique centrale à partir du Nigeria. Ces précisions ne sont pas simplement anecdotiques, elles fournissent l’arrière-plan sur lequel s’est développée une manière de travailler particulière que Gerhard Kubik qualifie lui-même de *random drifting*. Refusant l’idée qu’une recherche doive être pré-orientée par un projet ou par une problématique, il cherche à “découvrir les problèmes sur le terrain même” en se laisser porter par le hasard, de sorte que ce soient les données empiriques qui le guident vers la théorie (De Oliveira Pinto, Tiago. 1994. “Une expérience transculturelle, entretien avec Gerhard Kubik.” *Cahiers de musiques traditionnelles* 7: 222–23). D’où le caractère foisonnant de ses travaux, leur richesse descriptive mais aussi leur faible dimension synthétique. Face à ce double opus, et à l’œuvre tout entier qu’il représente, le “compte-rendu” s’avère délicat. Je me contenterai donc d’essayer de mettre en évidence quelques axes qui me paraissent ressortir des textes publiés ici, d’un point de vue plus socio-anthropologique que musicologique, c’est-à-dire sans entrer dans le détail des questions posées par les techniques de collecte et de traitement du matériau musical conçues par Gerhard Kubik.

Ce qui ressort avec force de la lecture en continu de ces deux volumes est que les musiques africaines n’ont rien à envier aux autres musiques, ni sur le plan de la richesse des moyens d’expression ni sur celui de la complexité des techniques utilisées. Les musiques africaines répondent à des organisations rigoureuses et tous leurs praticiens sont soumis à des règles qui s’apprennent et se transmettent de manières diverses mais auxquelles ils ne sauraient se soustraire. En témoigne l’existence de terminologies musicales locales, d’où, selon Gerhard Kubik, la nécessité de travailler à partir du vocabulaire indigène pour pénétrer le monde cognitif d’une population (1994, 158). D’autant plus que la musique apparaît comme une pratique sociale intimement liée à la reproduction du groupe, qui véhicule des codes de bonne conduite, une éthique (comme dans les chantefables yoruba; 2010, chap. 8) et diffuse des représentations du pouvoir (1994, 346–63). C’est pourquoi l’enseignement musical est toujours partie intégrante de l’éducation générale et joue un rôle primordial dans les rituels d’initiation, là où il s’en pratique. La place qu’occupe la musique dans la vie sociale implique que toutes deux évoluent de concert. Les musiques africaines entendues et enregistrées à un moment donné sont donc le produit de dynamiques de changement qui sont mues par de multiples facteurs, internes mais aussi
externes. Les travaux de Gerhard Kubik fournissent en effet d’abondants exemples d’influences, d’emprunts, de fertilisations croisées, qu’il s’agisse des instruments, des échelles, des rythmes ou des styles de performance. Il convient toutefois de noter que les répertoires les plus stables sont en général parties intégrantes de rituels de pouvoir ou de cérémonies ésotériques. Leur existence ne remet pas en cause la possibilité du changement musical mais, au contraire, la place dans la perspective d’une profondeur historique qui permet de l’apprécier vraiment et que Gerhard Kubik exploite jusqu’à proposer des hypothèses génétiques, comme celle de l’influence fondateuse des échelles employées par les joueurs d’arc musical khoisan sur l’ensemble des musiques jouées au sud du 14ème degré de latitude sud (1994, 212–40). Rejetant le cliché qui voudrait que la création dans les musiques africaines soit le résultat d’entreprises collectives et anonymes, l’auteur met en avant le rôle de l’individu. Les musiciens œuvrent évidemment au sein d’organisations culturelles et doivent, comme on l’a vu, obéir à des règles strictes mais, comme partout ailleurs, ils affirment leur personnalité (par l’interprétation, les styles de performance et la composition) à l’intérieur de systèmes de contraintes qu’il leur arrive de déborder. C’est d’ailleurs là un des moteurs internes du changement musical.

Pour Gerhard Kubik les musiques africaines sont spécifiques à un double niveau: d’une part, chacune d’entre elles possède des particularités propres, en dépit des traits qu’elles ont en commun et des relations qu’elles ont entretenues; de l’autre, les musiques africaines se distinguent clairement des musiques d’autres régions du monde. Les études de cas détaillent les propriétés singulières des musiques étudiées, par-delà lesquelles émergent des traits panafricains. Ceux-ci peuvent être regroupés en deux grands ensembles: les rapports musique-langue et les rapports musique-mouvement-corps. Gerhard Kubik affirme qu’il existe de fortes corrélations entre les caractéristiques stylistiques d’une musique et la langue parlée dans la région où elle est jouée, tout particulièrement lorsqu’il s’agit de langues à tons. Les phrases verbales suggèrent des associations musicales et réciproquement; l’apprentissage et la mémorisation de pièces musicales recourent souvent à des phrases mnémotechniques (1994, 9–74). En outre, les cultures africaines lient très étroitement la musique et le corps, notamment à travers la danse, mais pas seulement: elles incluent une conception du mouvement qui englobe les corps et les rythmes. La plupart des études de cas décrivent donc les figures rythmiques propres aux pièces et répertoires étudiés et le chapitre 6 du second volume présente une approche cognitive du “rythme” musical africain, rythme étant écrit ici au singulier et entre guillemets pour faire ressortir l’absence de mot désignant ce phénomène dans la plupart des langues africaines. Malheureusement, ce chapitre consiste à nouveau en une description minutieuse de l’organisation rythmique dans un certain nombre de musiques africaines mais n’offre aucune conclusion générale, aucune typologie systématique.

Cela ne résulte en aucun cas de l’incapacité de l’auteur mais bien de ses conceptions et de la recherche et des musiques africaines. Tout au long de ces pages, le lecteur trouve Gerhard Kubik en proie à un dilemme qu’il ne parvient pas à résoudre. D’un côté, il souligne l’historicité des musiques africaines, leur sensibilité aux échanges et emprunts qui les font évoluer, combinés aux tendances créatives des individus. De l’autre, il demeure tributaire d’une conception étroite et datée de la culture, bâtie sur la notion d’aire culturelle à l’intérieur de laquelle la musique est définie comme un ensemble de systèmes de communication liés, voire enfermés dans la culture (culture-bound) (2010, 1). Ce dilemme est formulé par l’auteur dès le début du second volume, à l’oreille du chapitre qui traite de l’approche cognitive du “rythme” musical africain: “a culture always manifests itself as a closed system of communication. By this I mean that the total margin of transmission of verbal and non-verbal concepts, ideas and forms of expression between individuals is
determined by the intra-cultural communicative repertoire. . . . I am not saying that cultures are closed systems . . . however, from a historical perspective, cultures may at any point in time be viewed as momentarily closed systems of communication. Regardless of their transformations, the momentary communicative repertoire of a culture is a distinctive arrangement understood within that culture” (2010, 6–7). This conception of the culture can be reinforced by the random drifting and leads to privileging not only case studies but also the adoption of musical analysis techniques. These two volumes are rich in transcriptions (music and lyrics), rhythmic descriptions, and constitute a precious resource for those who wish to work on the societies and musics discussed by Gerhard Kubik, but their lack of evidence of musical systems specific to each object of study and the possibility of developing comparisons. Even when Gerhard Kubik meets parallel the reflections from his studies of case can, it has not yet been possible to draw general conclusions; this is particularly striking in the chapters on cognition (2010, chap. 6) and on musical time (2010, chap. 10). Thus, it seems that he has difficulty in starting the rapid publication of the second volume, the reader is left in mind the marginality of Gerhard Kubik’s work compared to the debates that animate ethnomusicology and musicology over the past thirty years. The author admits his reservations towards the research of his colleagues ethnomusicologists, the concepts and the vocabulary that they use (De Oliveira Pinto, 1994). Consequently, he mentions in bibliography Simha Arom and Jean-Jacques Nattiez, for example, while mentioning Simha Arom and Jean-Jacques Nattiez for example, he does not take into account the works of the first in his reflections on rhythm and remains outside the project of a general musicology, particularly in his Encyclopédie pour le 21ème siècle, to which he has contributed (Kubik, Gerhard. 2005. “Les musiques-danses traditionnelles dans le cycle de l’année et le cycle de la vie.” In Musiques, une encyclopédie pour le 21ème siècle, volume 3. Musiques et cultures, edited by Jean-Jacques Nattiez, pp. 717–40. Paris: Actes Sud/Cité de la musique).

Gerhard Kubik has no doubt played a pioneering role in the diffusion of new representations of African music from the late 1950s: he has highlighted how complex and ordered they were by rules as precise as unwieldy; he has demonstrated that these musics were, like all productions of human culture, inscribed in history, and therefore subject to change; in addition, at the meeting of this generation of ethnomusicologists, he has judged worthy of interest the musics of urban music, for example, for the urban music of the end of the 1940s, and sometimes even earlier, were imposed in the streets, the dancing schools and the recording studios of African metropolitan areas. The singularity of the work of Gerhard Kubik is the reason of his richness but also of his limits. These two volumes can be considered as a document fascinating on the itineraries of a researcher-explorer (in the best sense of the term) passionate, as a source of information detailed (but also of developments inspired by an imagination excessively fertile which rises from the surinterpretation) to the proposals of certain African musics. They do not provide a curiously serious “theory of African music” and would contribute to elaborate in the form of a long effort of abstraction of the data susceptibles of entering in a comparative field.

Denis-Constant Martin
LAM (Les Afriques dans le monde), Sciences Po Bordeaux, Université de Bordeaux
d.c.martin@sciencespobordeaux.fr
© 2012, Denis-Constant Martin
Faire de l’anthropologie. Santé, science et développement, by Laurent Vidal, Paris: Editions La Découverte, 2010, 295 pp.

L’argument central du livre de Vidal est celui du “maintien d’une forme de veille analytique des conditions de l’exercice de l’anthropologie”, une anthropologie critique, pédagogique, réflexive de production de nouvelles connaissances tant pratiques que théoriques (272). L’auteur nous mène à cette proposition en trois parties. La première intitulée “Tous ensembles? Nécessités et contraintes de la rencontre des disciplines” couvre les deux premiers chapitres intitulés respectivement “Emergences d’un projet” et “Glissements progressifs”. La deuxième partie, “L’anthropologie face aux acteurs de la santé” comporte trois chapitres: les “Négociations de la place de l’anthropologie”, “De la recherche imaginée à l’intervention réelle” et “Le terrain des restitutions”. Une dernière partie, “Expositions”, discute en un chapitre des “Nouveaux contextes anthropologiques” puis propose une anthropologie critique particulière dans le chapitre final intitulé “Quelle anthropologie et pour quoi faire?”

Faire l’anthropologie d’une recherche impliquant l’anthropologue, voilà ce que Vidal nous invite à comprendre dans ce livre. Il le fait judicieusement au regard des idées que l’on peut avoir de l’anthropologie, voire des attentes de ceux qui voient arriver l’anthropologue au sein d’une équipe de recherche. Car ce dernier a désormais son histoire qui le précède bien qu’il s’agisse aussi pour Vidal de montrer que cette histoire est toujours “en train de se faire”. Cette histoire de la relation anthropologique se déroule en trois étapes. Dans la première il est question de “donner” au sein d’une équipe multidisciplinaire; dans la deuxième de “lutter” pour établir la légitimité de son approche par son ancrage circonstanciel, et dans la troisième, de faire un “serment”, soit faire part de son engagement à partir de ce positionnement particulier. Ainsi dès le départ s’agit-il d’un retour sur les manières de faire de l’anthropologie, les atouts, les limites, et les relations de l’anthropologue avec l’autre qui participe à la transformation de la discipline. Ces multi-réflexivités sont mises en scène autour des types de rencontres que noue l’anthropologue lors de sa participation à des recherches en développement. Dans le cas d’espèce, ces recherches sont au nombre de quatre, toutes menées en Afrique, plus spécifiquement au Sénégal et en Côte d’Ivoire, et portant sur les questions de la santé: le sida, la tuberculose, le paludisme et la santé maternelle. Les multiples situations générées par ces projets sont mises en parallèle tout au long de l’ouvrage en guise de fil conducteur.

Dans la première partie de l’ouvrage, Vidal montre à quel point la relation entre les divers acteurs “extérieurs” et “intérieurs” sont perméables et complexes, et devraient saisies au-delà du clivage Nord–Sud. Ainsi, va-t-il plus loin que la classique dichotomie entre deux hémisphères. Il mettra ainsi plutôt en scène une diversité d’acteurs, des Africains comme des acteurs venus d’ailleurs, qui négocient leurs positionnements in situ. Parmi ces acteurs, ceux qui proposant l’aide et la mettant en œuvre sont mis en vedette, l’auteur anthropologue étant placé au centre. Vidal nous fait comprendre la coresponsabilité des disciplines et le fonctionnement des équipes de recherche, les distinctions et similarités entre l’anthropologue et les autres acteurs. Par exemple, “le délicat passage de la connaissance à l’action” et “la volonté d’oser et de traiter de questions qui ont une portée scientifique au-delà du projet” est aussi partagé par des chercheurs d’autres disciplines.

À la fois chercheur et responsable de projet, l’auteur se positionne à la confluence d’autres disciplines et des acteurs de la santé. Même en s’insérant dans ces équipes, il se dit doublement extérieur: à la structure de santé et au monde médical (73).
Ce dernier positionnement est expliqué par le rôle occupé par des anthropologues l’ayant précédé et dont l’auteur tente de pallier l’isolement en se plaçant plutôt au sein d’équipes soignantes et de la structure de santé, au sein de la tradition de recherche, etc.

La seconde partie de l’ouvrage éclaire les différents moments de la recherche. L’auteur passe d’une position d’observateur distancié à celle de participant réfléchi, c’est-à-dire de quelqu’un qui œuvre à la réalisation de l’action en train de se faire avec ceux qui accueillent l’étude, voire ceux qui administrent et gèrent la santé dans les pays d’accueil. L’auteur nous fait voir les étapes multiples de la réalisation des projets, non pas en adoptant une réflexivité introressive qu’il dit ne pas avoir sa place en anthropologie et redondante, mais une réflexivité de surface si je puis la décrire ainsi. Il nous donne l’impression de nous retrouver dans une salle remplie de miroirs dans laquelle l’auteur analyse et décrit chacun de ses actes, ses effets sur les autres et vice versa. À l’image des activités de “rencontres miroirs” comme celle développée dans le cadre d’un des projets afin d’assister les sages-femmes à discuter de leurs propres pratiques. En cela il est fascinant de voir en quoi le circonstanciel s’installe dans la mise en œuvre des projets et comment l’anthropologue est capable de suivre ces mouvements par sa flexibilité et son ouverture, bien que l’auteur semble à certains instants regretter que l’approche anthropologique n’ait pu être constituée a priori.

L’étape de restitution des résultats apporte une discussion intéressante. L’auteur insiste de manière convaincante qu’elle est bien “du terrain” et particulièrement riche en données ethnographiques. Ce qui lui fait regretter l’absence de cette étape; ce qui a été le cas dans plus de la moitié des projets au sein desquels l’auteur était impliqué.

Ainsi dessiné le quotidien de l’anthropologue à la fois chercheur et responsable de projet, une discussion de la place de l’anthropologie se poursuit dans la dernière partie de l’ouvrage. Là Vidal nous amène à comprendre la “naturalité” de l’ethnographie multi-site et aussi de la redéfinition de l’anthropologie vis-à-vis des autres disciplines en cours de route. Pourquoi l’anthropologie se pose-t-elle comme une science devant se vulgariser alors que d’autres disciplines ne le font pas? Comment l’anthropologie, une science qui s’écrit, peut aussi être critiquée d’a-scientificité par son excès d’écriture? Voilà quelques questions fascinantes que l’auteur soulève ainsi que les pistes à suivre. Distinguant une anthropologie légitimiste (autonome classique) et une “partagée” (vendue aux projets), il propose la voie médiane d’une anthropologie critique, voire d’une pédagogie critique comme “idéale”. L’auteur propose aussi une approche axée sur trois grandes postures nommées capitalisation, négociation et réflexivité (dans le sens de retour sur la discipline et d’innovation de cette dernière).

Le seul regret porté à l’ouvrage demeure par ailleurs son enfermement non pas dans une image de l’anthropologie isolée des autres disciplines, mais d’une anthropologie enfermée dans le “laboratoire” hermétique des recherches qui ne laisse jamais ressentir l’humanité à laquelle un projet de santé se dit répondre: ni odeur, ni couleur, ni “air” de l’Afrique où se situent pourtant les projets. En effet, voilà une anthropologie à l’image clinique des projets souvent clos sur eux-mêmes préoccupés tels qu’ils le sont par leurs multiples tâches de gestion, de coordination et d’administration et dont les avenirs effraient un peu. Ni la santé, le développement ou l’humain ne sont pensés hors de l’ontologie naturaliste des projets, si ce n’est qu’un soupçon de discussion autour de notions de prévention, d’observance et de représentation de la maladie à peine revisitées. Seule l’anthropologie est mise au regard de son innovation ou plutôt de son refoulement au cœur d’équipes multidisciplinaires sans jamais rencontrer, semble-t-il, un autre acteur que ceux œuvrant au sein des projets en tant que chercheur, dispensaire d’âde ou
administrateur accueillant l’étude. Le vécu, les dires et la souffrance de ceux devant être soignés et qui sont la raison d’être des projets, échappent à cette anthropologie.

Julie Laplante
Sociologie et anthropologie, Université d’Ottawa
jlaplan2@uottawa.ca
© 2012, Julie Laplante