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BOOK REVIEWS


It always takes time to get proceedings from scholarly symposia published. This volume contains papers presented at a hopefully epoch-making seminar on the study of religions in Africa at the University of Zimbabwe in September 1992. It was the first regional conference of the International Association for the History of Religions, which dealt with the religious history of Africa. In addition to a Word of Welcome by the then Vice Chancellor, Professor Gordon Chavunduka (p3), it contains 17 items. Six of them are by scholars who are—or have been—related to the University of Zimbabwe either on a permanent basis (M. Bourdillon), or more temporarily (J. Platvoet, J. Cox and F. Verstraelen).

The volume is quite informative. Even if the main focus is on the study of religions in Africa, it also shares interesting insights about African religious history. Platvoet offers an ambitious long-term perspective (pp 46–102), which also adds some qualifications on Terence Ranger’s plea for the historical study of African traditional religions (see also pp 126–7). There are most useful items on the rise of Islam, and the development of Jewry in South Africa (cf. pp 293–309 and 434–57).

The strength of the volume is its contribution to the historiography of religious studies, even if the regional focus of the respective authors are very evident. His Ghanaian experience qualifies Platvoet’s surveys (pp 46–102), and 105–38), as do the South African and Nigerian starting points inform what M. Prozesky and J. Olupona provide (cf. pp 229–51 and 185–200, with supplementary general survey on West Africa, 211–19).

By implication, the volume pleads for methodological pluralism in the study of religions in Africa. Most sophisticated is Cox, who spells out an argument in favour of an open-ended phenomenological approach to the study from within of different African traditional religions (pp 155–82). In his very informative survey of the study of religions in Nigeria, Olupona illustrates his methodological comprehensiveness (pp 185–218). In his personally involved and very thought-provoking contribution, Bourdillon convincingly shows how anthropological époque has to be combined with judgements with reference to common human concerns (cf. pp 139–54).

Commenting on the volume as a whole, I have to share a few critical observations. Given the provenance of the papers, it is to be regretted that they do not give room for an item on the study of Islam in Malawi and Zimbabwe by Dr. E. Mandivenga, an expert on the subjects, who at the time was Chairman in the Department, which hosted the conference.
My more general observations concern the limitations of what the volume has to say about the study of Christianity in Africa. Different authors express a necessary criticism of claims to interpret African traditional religions from Christian starting points in an attempt to develop an African Christian Theology. In his contribution, Verstraelen advances a healthy but very general argument in favour of the study of Church History from an African perspective. In his survey of “The Religions of Africa in their Historical Order” (pp 46–102), Platvoet limits himself to subscribe to the distinction between “Ethiopian Christianity” (sic!), “Modern Missionary Christianity” and “Indigenous Christianity” (pp 58–64). This classification may serve some purpose at a very general level. It is limited, however, as it does not take very far the study from within of Christianity in its variety in different African contexts.

In his keynote address (pp 37–45), the Secretary-General of the International Association for the History of Religions, Dr Michael Pye, challenged the conference to consider “what is the deep-seated frame of reference...which informs cultural insider’s reflection on African religion”; we may add in its plurality (cf. p 45). It seems to me that Olupona’s comprehensive contribution on the study of religions in Nigeria is closest to an answer to that question.

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This welcome book brings together many of the issues concerning children in Zimbabwe today that give rise to grave concern. These include: deteriorating educational opportunities and attendance at school, deteriorating nutritional levels, deteriorating health and health facilities, increasing shortage of housing, child labour and child sexual abuse. It is useful to have this data brought together in an accessible form.

One problem I have with the book is the precise relationship between the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) and the problems described. Some of the problems are directly related to the policies of ESAP, such as the introduction of fees for education and health services. However, the social development fund was introduced with ESAP to alleviate these problems, and poor administration of the fund is not the fault of the programme. Other causes of problems, such as the decline in employment opportunities, the lack of funds in government and the decline of the value of the Zimbabwean currency, are assumed in this book to
result from the Programme, without consideration of prior trends and the general economic administration of the country. The author cites popular derogatory perceptions of ESAP and appears to accept them uncritically. Sometimes the blame placed on ESAP seems extreme: "Rape within marriage has reportedly increased largely because men can no longer afford prostitutes" (p. 42).

The author does not always make clear the origin and status of the data he cites. "It is thought that the number of working children has escalated to over 50 000 . . ." (p. 39). "There are estimated to be between 10 000 and 12 000 children living on the streets of Zimbabwe today" (p. 41). Who has these thoughts and estimates, and on what basis? My information is that the number of children living on the streets is perhaps a tenth of the figure given. Even when I have no reason to doubt the author's statements, I should like more information. I should like, for example, to know more about the information from which the author concludes that various forms of child abuse are increasing. Statements about family disintegration need more careful analysis than the author gives them, both on its nature and on its causes.

Some of the tables could be more helpful. What are we to conclude from Table 1, which shows that in 1976, 11.5% of Whites and 13.1% of Blacks were in primary school? Table 2 gives absolute figures for patterns of disease between Whites and Blacks, and no percentages.

It is useful to have the issues concerning children expressed concisely in one short booklet. But it provides little in the way of new insight or new information.

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Dr. Mlambo’s book has explored factors leading to the inception, and impact of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) in Zimbabwe. The study contains an immense amount of material obviously based on months of earnest investigation.

An analysis of a typical International Monetary Fund/World Bank (IMF/ WB) reform package is presented in the opening chapter. The chapter evaluates the effectiveness of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs). Indeed all the evidence points to the fact that SAPs are to blame for the situations in which developing countries find themselves. The chapter contains an interesting debate on whom to blame for the failure of SAPs [pg. 19]. IMF and WB officials argue that "... they are merely advisors ...
and were not directly involved in how governments distributed the burdens of adjustment”. Payer (1987) dismisses this as a lie [see pg. 19]. Dashwood (1996) disputed the fact that IMF/WB reform programmes inherently cause hardships for the poor majority [pg. ix, para 4 and 5].

The next two chapters of the book present the background to the introduction of ESAP in Zimbabwe. The wisdom of producing Chapters 2 and 3 [pg. 29-54] is open to question. This is not to deny that these two chapters contain invaluable information. The information contained is not new at all. Dr. Mlambo could have referred the reader to the already existing literature on the history of Zimbabwe. A probit analysis on the decision to participate in SAPs could improve the presentation in Chapter 3. Also missing is a well-motivated discussion on the nature and extent of the macroeconomic and sectoral crisis that bedevilled the Zimbabwean economy over the 1980-90 period (see Elbadawi, Ghura and Uwujaren, 1992).

Chapter 4 of the book is entitled “Scheming for the Poor: Education and Health, 1980-1990”. This chapter gives a detailed discussion of the “policy issues” in the health and education sectors before and after independence (first ten years). Indeed the discussion is appealing, and all the evidence points to a notable improvement in the provision of social services to the Zimbabwean majority. However, this was not without its “teething” problems. This is made clear in the two final sections of the chapter: “Educational Reform: An Analysis” [pg 67-71] and “Scheming for the Poor: Health Reform, 1980-1990” [pg. 72-78].

Chapter 5 of the book has aroused strong feelings in many quarters. Entitled “The ESAP Counter-Revolution: Scheming Against the Poor: Health and Education Under ESAP, 1990-1995”, this chapter acid tests the effectiveness of ESAP in Zimbabwe’s health and education sectors. The outcome cannot be over emphasized; “… the reform programme affected negatively the welfare of the Zimbabwean majority” and “most of the gains made in the first decade of independence with respect to the provision of, and the majority’s access to, education and health services” were reversed. This is made clear in paragraph 2 on page 87, which states:

... AIDS could no longer be considered the greatest threat to public health ... the biggest health crisis is the inevitable decline in the standard of living as a result of ESAP.

Dr. Mlambo could have improved his method of analysis by incorporating economy wide models (see Davies et al, 1994; Chittiga, 1996). These models are more illustrative than the “historical-analysis-of-facts” approach adopted in this book.

The book winds up with a conclusion. The conclusion puts a new complexion on reform packages. In brief, the reform packages should integrate poverty related policies in order for them to develop a human face. The author, however, does not give any practical suggestions about
the redistribution e.g. targeting and how to identify the poor. The potential costs of the suggested policy are not discussed. This could have been more helpful to policy makers in Zimbabwe. For policy purposes, the study has achieved little success, and is already out of date. As Economists, we should be trying to look at the possible solutions to our problems rather than spend our resources on analysing the "by-gones". What is the way forward?

Dr. Mlambo's book is especially suitable for the upcoming scholars who are really keen on knowing the origins of ESAP in Zimbabwe.

References


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The Practice of Smallholder Irrigation: Case Studies from Zimbabwe


This edited volume is a multi-disciplinary study of smallholder irrigation in Zimbabwe. Eight case studies make up the book. The case studies focus on interaction between technical and social aspects of smallholder irrigation, standardisation in schemes managed by government,
management under water scarcity, social and political relations among irrigators from diverse physical and ideological backgrounds, strategies adopted by resource deficient irrigators, interface issues at catchment level and irrigation schemes initiated by farmers.

There is a dearth of post-independence literature on smallholder irrigation in Zimbabwe: this book is therefore very welcome. A jewel of the book is that it is a positive attempt to go beyond the ‘disciplinary fragmentation... which inhibits the ability to integrate knowledge in an all encompassing totality which spans the entire spectrum of experience’ (Murphree, 1977, 3). This has been achieved without compromising on detailed presentation of evidence to support conclusions.

Furthermore, one does not see a romanticised view of the farmers, a refreshing departure from some of the accounts that uncritically see a panacea in indigenous technical knowledge systems. Also a welcome feature of the book is that farmers are not viewed as a homogeneous group. The cases presented in this book show that within the ‘community’ of farmers, are several groups with different and sometimes competing interests.

A glaring omission in the literature review is A. K. H. Weinrich’s *African Farmers in Rhodesia*. Weinrich’s account of smallholder irrigation in the colonial era is valuable in that she does not take a dualistic approach to state peasant relationships. May be because of this omission, Manzungu and van der Zaag’s book falls into what Moyo observes as a weakness in institutional studies that are based on ‘the vision of a monolithic state, identified in Zimbabwe around such institutions as Agritex and District Administration . . . For such a perspective may miss the heterogeneous character of the state’s role including its negotiated involvement in local administration, local power issues and in critical matters surrounding land (or water)’ (Moyo, 1995, 69).3

A topic not adequately addressed in any of the case studies is that of produce marketing. Fortunately, the authors are aware of this. As they point out in the book, there is a need for ‘more in-depth inquiries into household strategies, the obstacles faced and the alternatives sought’ regarding the issue of marketing (p.223).

*The Practice of Smallholder Irrigation* is a welcome contribution to the study of communal area irrigation. It is valuable to students of applied science regardless of orientation.

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1 Murphree, M. W., “Strategic considerations for enhancing scholarship at the University of Zimbabwe”, Zambezia, XXIV, (i), 1-112, 1997.

In this book the authors reflect on the relations between Zimbabwe and its neighbours by looking at the border policies of the nations that border with Zimbabwe namely, South Africa and Mozambique. Nkiwane explores in detail the Kazungula-Caprivi strip where the borders of Namibia, Zambia, Botswana and Zimbabwe converge. Perhaps the greatest strength of this work is that it places the borders within the context of a larger process of national and regional development. Furthermore this is a time when the whole outlook on border policies world-wide is changing because of liberalisation and greater economic interdependence.

There is an abundance of literature on regional co-operation and integration in Southern Africa but what distinguishes this book from the rest is that it looks at the border posts and the policies that are implemented. The first chapter is devoted to the definition of borders within international relations theory. Borders are an important symbol of state sovereignty. Whilst borders have caused wars in different parts of the world, the Southern African region has not witnessed such serious conflicts. The only conflict that has reached the international court of justice for arbitration has been that between Botswana and Namibia over the Sidudu strip.

The sanctity and the inviolability of these borders is clearly stated in article 3 (3) of the Organisation of African Unity, which calls on member states "to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of each state and for its inalienable right to an independent existence". This makes all territorial claims unlawful. Although the authors seem to be lamenting over the artificiality of these colonial borders and call for the rationalisation of the border policies in view of future conflicts, Zimbabwe and its neighbours seem to have accepted the permanence of these borders and the likelihood of a border conflict that will threaten peace in the region seems to be far off.

Zimbabwe being landlocked has maintained good neighbourly relations. Consequently the attainment of majority rule in South Africa in 1994 has transformed the Southern African political and economic relations and cross border activities and trade links have expanded. The authors in the book call for an open border policy to facilitate development and cooperation in the region but they do not clearly define what the open border policy is. Although the free movement of peoples in the region will be welcome, an open border policy should evolve slowly as there are a number of problems that will arise because of a complete liberalisation of border policies, eg. a brain drain towards South Africa.
At the moment the border areas continue to deal with the problems of poaching, border jumping, and smuggling. Even though the Southern African countries have signed the SADC treaty which calls for the establishment of an economic community of states, no significant steps have been taken towards the attainment of this goal. This is because most of the states in the region would want to protect some vital sectors of their economies from external competition. At the moment the direction and volume of trade flow in the region is dominated by South Africa. And an open border policy would benefit countries which are roughly at the same levels of development. It is the diversification and development of industrial capabilities that will influence trade policies and concurrently liberalised border policies which will facilitate inter-state co-operation and development in Southern Africa.

Unfortunately, the book's strength is undermined by the fact that it leaves out the analysis of the Zimbabwe/Zambia and the Zimbabwe/Botswana borders. The inclusion of these two countries would have completed the study of regional development in Southern Africa. The title promises us that it is going to talk about Zimbabwe's international borders and only talks about the border relations of Mozambique and South Africa and the Caprivi strip. In addition, an analysis of the countries' levels of economic development would have been appropriate, because a country's economy is an important determinant of its foreign policy. A country's level of economic development also plays an important role on issues of commercial interests which also determines its border policies as well as issues of co-operation and development.

Despite these problems the book is a welcome contribution to the ongoing debates on economic development and regional integration in Southern Africa. Its detailed account of the border areas and the problems inherent in these areas will make a worthwhile contribution to graduate and undergraduate courses on African International Relations, International Law and the politics of Southern Africa.

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