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Book Reviews


These two books, directed at people actively involved in research or research administration, provide some interesting case studies from a five-year programme of investigation into the implementation of research sponsored by the (South African) Scientific Advisory Council, and directed by the author under the auspices of the Human Sciences Research Council. The programme was launched due to mounting concern that the expected benefits from state-supported research were not being realised due to poor implementation.

The investigation consisted of two phases. In the first a group of 58 researchers from a wide variety of disciplines and an assortment of state, university, industrial, and private research organisations were brought together to consider retrospectively the critical factors contributing to the implementation success (or otherwise) of research projects they had undertaken.

In the second phase, another group of 50 researchers – with 55 research topics that had already been approved, but which had not yet been started as formal projects – participated in a two-day implementation workshop, based on the results of the first phase and on general principles of change management such as stakeholder analysis and involvement, before proceeding with their research projects. In this investigation, research with a view to implementation (R/I) meant:

"...the assumption of personal responsibility by the researchers for attaining their chosen implementation objectives, by appropriate, collaborative involvement of the important stakeholders in team action to identify the relevant problems and opportunities, formulate the goals and plans, and execute the project – all within an action research framework.

Implementation is (regarded as being) achieved to the extent that the chosen objectives are attained, as evidenced by changes in the target group's knowledge, skills, perceptions, beliefs and finally: by their actions – especially by their results in the stipulated effectiveness areas" (p 188).

A consequence of this approach is that it also makes good sense to talk about the implementation of basic research – as is demonstrated by one of the examples described in the first book.
An important feature of the implementation workshop was that participants were divided into small, heterogeneous groups in which they took turns to explain their research objectives, rationale and method to six or seven fellow researchers from other disciplines, with an opportunity for questions followed by lively discussion.

Participants subsequently reported favourably on this experience, mentioning in particular the freshness and originality of the comments from researchers in other disciplines. Many significantly revised their research plans.

The progress of the various research projects was then monitored over the next few years, with some visits by programme staff and with such moral support and advice as proved feasible.

After three years participants were asked to submit reports on the course and degree of implementation success of their respective research projects. (The progress of some projects which were of longer duration was assessed up to six years later).

The final tally was that 40% of the assessed projects were regarded as highly successful, 23% as partially successful, and 36% as unsuccessful. (It is noteworthy that 8 of the 55 projects originally registered never got started in any significant way).

Gouws constructed a 17-item implementation effort assessment scale with satisfactory inter-rater reliability. Degree of implementation effort – as measured by this scale – showed a very strong association with implementation outcome for this group of researchers. This would seem to support one of Gouws’ main contentions in designing and conducting the programme, ie that a major determinant of implementation success is the degree of personal responsibility taken for it by the researcher. Gouws sets out his approach to research with a view to implementation (R/I) in more detail in part II of the first book. There he discusses the notion of implementation in contrast to more passive concepts such as diffusion and dissemination, the role of mindsets and other individual differences – with their implications for R/I team work, the importance of considering and involving the stakeholders in innovation, factors that promote or hinder implementation, a methodological framework for R/I, and, finally, a critical overview of the R/I notion, with a consideration of common objections against the view that researchers should seriously concern themselves about implementation.

This valuable conceptual analysis is supported and supplemented by the case studies in the second book, which provide the telling, concrete examples of R/I in action. The contributions by Augustyn, van der Spuy, Barnard, and du Plessis, for instance, demonstrate the power of a deliberate, proactive implementation R/I strategy in four widely different fields: wine-making, the collection and use of national medical trauma statistics, the teaching of high school mathematics, and the
introduction of water hydraulic power into the gold mining industry. An important point arising from these case studies is the potential economic significance of early implementation. For example, Augustyn's results, by being made available and implemented early, probably averted a wine industry loss of R3m due to stuck fermentation in 1989 alone (a sum, by the way, five times as large as the Scientific Advisory Council’s grant for the entire implementation programme).

Not all the case studies selected represent implementation successes. Some help to demonstrate how and why implementation so often goes wrong.

The approach to research implementation set out in the first book and demonstrated by the case studies may be more appropriate in research situations where there is little emphasis on intellectual property rights, e.g. public health, education, and even in-house industrial research establishments. While Gouws' approach would still be relevant to hi-tech situations where the intellectual property stakes are very high, it will need to be complemented by adequate measures to protect intellectual ownership – an aspect not mentioned by him.

Another feature missing from the South African programme is formal early involvement of the staff of the receiving organisation (e.g., a business firm targeted as the most promising candidate for utilising the particular research findings) in implementation attitudes and skills training – something hinted at in the conclusion of the first book.

We urgently need representative information on the base rate of implementation success for different categories of research projects in different settings. The author's suspicion that such base rates could be quite low may well be right, in which case the claim of a demonstrated strong connection between implementation effort (on the part of the researchers) and implementation success warrants serious consideration.

This ambitious programme and its results are a valuable contribution in an important and relatively neglected area. In these days of ever-tightening research funding and increasing demands for researcher accountability, Gouws' recommendations at the end of his first book certainly provide policy makers with food for thought. He proposes that it will be beneficial to all concerned IF:

"- Submission of a sound implementation plan and budget were to be required as an integral part of every application for research funding.

- The implementation track record of a research team and organisation were to become one of the important criteria for the allocation of research funding" (p 206).

With allowance for their inevitable local colour and biases these two books could form a very worthwhile basis for a short course or workshop in research implementation.

The papers in this volume are based on contributions to an international workshop on ‘The Situation of the Elderly’ which was held in Gaborone, Botswana, from March 29 to April 1, 1993.

Ageing is a process that has begun to attract increasing scholarly attention. What is popularly termed the “greying of the population” constitutes a major problem for many societies. Changes in the number and proportion of older people in the total population have implications for, inter alia, the social structure, family health care, housing and poverty. The multi-disciplinary team which participated in the workshop was composed of individuals who were technically well-positioned to tackle aspects of this neglected subject.

The volume is divided into four parts. The papers included in Part I - “Information Needs and Policy at the National Level” - introduce readers to the subject of ageing and also explore the policy dimension. Alex Kalachi’s paper serves as a backdrop in which he discusses the process of ageing in a regional and global framework. This contribution should help the reader to contextualise the more specific papers covered in the rest of the volume.

Mbulawa Mugabe’s paper focuses on the health and social policies related to elderly people in Botswana. He argues that the structure and organisation of existing health and social services are inadequate to deal with the multiplicity of problems associated with ageing. Coombes, Khulumani and Ngome’s paper presents a profile of the elderly in Botswana. They examine the aged from a demographic dimension and highlight related factors. For instance, they show that the number of elderly people who are economically active had dropped from 8.5 percent in 1971 to 7.5 percent in 1991. Their findings also reveal that elderly people tend to be resident in rural areas, and have low levels of literacy and formal education. They point out that the extended family network remains an important dimension in the lives of the aged.

Part 2 of this volume focuses on the cultural and traditional factors affecting the elderly at the village level. Ingstad’s paper deals with various aspects of the lives of elderly people in Mankgodi, a small village in the Kweneng District. She draws
attention to the changing status of the aged in the wake of "modernisation". Tlou’s paper examines the reciprocal perception of the elderly and young people regarding the process of ageing. She concludes that the elderly in Botswana are still viewed as an important resource in child care, socialisation and other cultural activities. Bruun’s ethnographic investigation of the elderly in rural Botswana is undertaken against the prism of the funeral ritual. This case study is the product of participant observation "...during the preparation of the burial of an old woman". The author provides fascinating insights on how old Batswana use the funeral as a device to influence changes in society.

Part 3 – “Health, Illness Care at the Village Level” – consists of a selection of papers which aim to illustrate the relationship between old age and health. Ingstad and Bruun concluded that it has become increasingly difficult for absent family members to maintain a good standard of living for the elderly people who remain in the village. Clausen and Sandberg’s contribution seeks to evaluate the health status of elderly people in Mankgodi. This impressionistic account, based on findings from medical examinations and a questionnaire, revealed that the health condition of the elderly was "relatively good".

Part 4 – “Needs and Suggestions for Solutions” – considers selected aspects of ageing. In addition, the papers in this section address policy issues. Guillette’s paper focuses on how the processes of modernisation and social change have altered the meaning of old age from “elderhood” to “elder dependency”. Ngome’s paper is concerned with old people’s subjective experiences regarding ageing. He concludes that: "The elderly do not want to be seen as a burden to society but as a potential resource". Raditladi’s account chronicles his fascinating experience as part of the greying population. His down-to-earth presentation includes useful policy recommendations.

The concluding chapter by the editors provided an overview of the main themes of the papers included in the volume. In this respect they deal with the changes in the health, social and economic status of elderly people. They also make important policy recommendations to ensure that the care and support for the elderly remain critical policy issues.

All in all, this volume represents a welcome effort to create a more informed view of problems associated with ageing. It is a valuable addition to the paucity of research on the elderly in Botswana. More significantly, it sets the stage for the state and other interested parties to address the urgent need for public initiatives to enhance the welfare of the aged.

Reviewed by Louis Molamu, Department of Sociology, University of Botswana, P Bag 0022, Gaborone, Botswana.
State and Resistance in South Africa, 1939-1985 is a major work that seeks to cover a gap in the South African historiography by focusing on the often neglected subject – the struggles of the black majority. The author posits that the aftermath of more than three centuries of racial domination will be felt for a very long time after the birth of a new non-racial South Africa. Given this concern, the book returns to the brutal transition from segregation to apartheid, in order to illustrate the painful continuities of racial oppression as well as to examine the contradictions, complexities and nuances between those relations of repression and resistance.

Such an approach is important for those seeking to unveil the challenges that lie ahead for the post-colonial state. A number of questions are raised with specific reference to the relationship between racial domination and state formation. For the purposes of this book, the author convincingly argues that most analysis has failed to place the struggles of the black majority centrally on the agenda of an understanding of state formation. Muthien notes that, if capital and the white working class can be argued to have shaped state formation, what about the struggles of the black working class? He further demonstrates that the struggles of the oppressed have all too often been evaluated in terms of their own goals and viewed as having failed, leaving the basis of state power intact, and blacks have often been portrayed as ‘victims’ of the inexorable march of capitalism and omnipotent state repression. In this study, resistance is firmly placed on the agenda of analysis of the South African state, by examining the ways in which black people evade, resist and struggle on a daily and organised level against state control over their lives. These forms of resistance, it is argued, confound the very ability of the state to achieve control in civil society.

The book’s chapters focus on the growth of an African proletariat in Cape Town between squatting settlements in the Cape Peninsula, 1939-1948; influx control in the Western Cape, 1939-1965; organisational politics in Cape Town; forms of protest and resistance, and finally state responses to the urban crisis.

The book successfully demonstrates that the process of establishing state control over movements and lives of black people in South Africa was fraught with contradictions and remained incomplete, despite the harshest form of control. Pass controls are cited as the most interventionist and pernicious system of control over the black majority. Alongside these controls, the apartheid state systematically structured and segmented the labour market on racial and gender lines. Muthien notes that few studies have examined the segmentation of the labour market and the differentiation of conditions of material reproduction along gender lines.
The study acknowledges a major point which a number of labour historians misused in the past, ie the struggles of the oppressed have all too often been evaluated in terms of their organisational or campaign goals and therefore viewed as having failed, since the basis of state power had apparently been left intact. It demonstrates that resistance under highly repressive conditions consists of a variety of struggles, confrontations and circumventions that do not always coalesce into organisational opposition. Thus for South Africa, different forms of struggles evolved, from bread and butter struggles in the 1940s to mass national campaigns in the 1950s, to sabotage and mass insurrection in the 1960s, prevailing under different material conditions at different historical moments.

Broad conclusions can be extrapolated from this study and these in my opinion will be of paramount importance to many scholars especially those who are university-based and focus their attention on the behaviour of the state. First, the state is examined as an arena of struggle and as an institution, which is neither monopolistic nor possessing a great degree of internal coherence. Most importantly, the making and implementation of state policy is often fiercely contested and contradictory. Secondly, the study established that in the context of South Africa, the state does not only respond and function in the interests of the dominant classes, but is forced in an immediate sense to respond to struggles from below. One needs to just look at the challenges put forward by the mass squatting at Crossroads, 1976 uprising, mass influx of the people into the cities in the 1980s, the 1984-1987 township regulations which led to the internal reorganisation of the repressive apparatus of the state and the unbanning of the ANC and PAC, negotiations, non-racial democratic elections and the swearing in of Nelson Mandela as state President.

Reviewed by Thomas Deve, Assistant Editor, SAPES Trust, P O Box MP 111, Mount Pleasant, Harare, Zimbabwe.


Western discourse on Africa for centuries has been jaundiced and imperial. It need no further corroboration that the denigration of Africa’s cultural productions through misquotations and misrepresentation has been monumental. Given the problematic approach to Africa, it is quite compelling and challenging to put up a work as great as Culture in Africa: An Appeal for Pluralism.

It is noted in the introduction of the book that the search for pluralism becomes very important when one considers that Afrocentrism or Eurocentrism at
some stage becomes stifling, reductive and reactionary. Whilst this sounds very controversial, it is boldly stated that Afrocentrism expels and silences, whilst Eurocentrism seeks to dominate the other. The task of the book therefore is to perform a number of challenging negotiations with African culture in order for it to open up, to become visible, and move from the margin to its own centre and to the centre of world attention.

This collection of essays by ethnomusicologists, linguists, writers and researchers from various backgrounds explores Zimbabwean church music drama, religious broadcasting and African culture, the African one party state, languages in Botswana, Kenyan popular literature, Islamic architecture and art, Nigerian theatre; the political appropriation of legacies like that of Shaka in South Africa and finally, indigenous writings and political struggles.

This array of essays underscores the need for a broader acceptance of critical thinking and a concomitant rejection of incongruent analysis and constellations of theorising about Africa. The fear of ideas and theories is a criss-crossing movement.

Whilst the reviewer acknowledges that culture is dynamic as reflected in most contributions in this book, one feels compelled to reiterate that most of the contributors do not explore in greater depth the impact of tradition in the various areas under scrutiny. For example, one reads statements like "...contemporary Black church music in Zimbabwe follows indigenous patterns" (p44), but it is also common knowledge that most Christian churches in the Africa discouraged the use of traditional instruments in the church, and stuck talismanically to their hymn books provided with staff notation and music arrangements to the extent that the tunes were exactly the same as those of their mother churches outside Africa. The question then one begs is at what point do the indigenous patterns influence the traditional layout and even the thinking of the Christian church? What I suppose happens is that the African recipients are equipped with capabilities of rewriting the messages in their own terms based on their own cultural contexts, thereby rewriting the intended message and possibly counteracting the potential message from other cultural contexts. As noted by Hilde Arnsten and Knut Lundby in their analysis of the electronic church in Zimbabwe, "...no one feels comfortable with someone else's junk".

The aspect which the reader is forced to search for, is the appeal for pluralism in the various contributions. For example, when one reads Chenjerai Hove's chapter on the One State, One Faith, One Lord, one feels that everybody is being forced to conform because of a simplistic postulation that "...no family can have two fathers". Thus "one nation, one leader" becomes the dominant image and we do not get information on the opposite tendencies or philosophical outlook reinforcing pluralism.
This search becomes very complex especially in the chapter on Islamic architecture as the opening line of the essay notes. "The umma of Islam does not only mean confessing to the same religion, but also sharing the patterns of daily life". Whilst this is a correct observation, one would have expected the analysis to move beyond the architecture and arts of Islamic society, because this is a civilisation and culture developing on other already existing forms of tradition which in turn might constitute the dominant aesthetic value with the Islamic influence only adopted as an ornamental character. As acknowledged by the author: "The attempts of Bravmann, Vansina and Prussin to define the expressions of Islamic art in sub-Saharan Africa have brought to light material and created an awareness of the problem of the Islamic identity in the arts and architecture in black Africa which is an important point of departure for further research in a field which is still in its infancy" (p143).

The analysis in this book would have yielded more if it had engaged a wider catchment area of African writers beyond Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka for the perceptions on culture. For example, Bodil Folke Frederiken’s chapter on popular writing in Kenya misses the impact of powerful authors like N’gugi wa Thiongo and their arguments when it comes to critical discourse on Africa and African writing. This book ironically commits the very crime it accused Afrocentrism of committing, namely that is expels and silences. It is instructive to note that the negotiating entry point to understanding Africa which is postulated as manifold ranges from functionalist, semiotic, dramaturgical, Weberian, Durkheimian, Marxian, feminist, to post-structuralist. This has to be done through protagonists like Wilhelm Dilthey, Antonio Gramsci, Roland Barthes, Erving Goffman, Michael Weber, Victor Turner, Paul Willis, Michel Faucault, Joan Francois Lyotard, Jurgon Habernaso and Edward Said. This bias by the editor Raoul Granqvist destroys a good cause–because what Africa needs is a tolerant post-independence discourse that can be successfully cleansed and exorcised from the spectre of European domination and the baggage of the past which is embedded in patriarchy and tradition.

Reviewed by Thomas Deve, Assistant Editor, Sapes Trust, Harare, Zimbabwe.


The three research reports reflected in this edition by Dr Keigher make very interesting reading. The description and analysis of the nature, extent and causes of homelessness among poor elderly urban Americans are quite educative, particularly to the non-American scholars and professionals in the fields of social work.
and urban sociology. The editor deserves a commendation for putting together the reports in a manner which facilitates a better understanding of the problem of homelessness. The four case descriptions in chapter five could evoke strong emotions among the the faint-hearted readers. No doubt, the edition is a major contribution to the ever-expanding volume of literature on homelessness in urban America.

However, I would like to make some general comments with reference to the research methods, and some conclusions and recommendations of the studies. The general methodology employed in a 1988 Chicago study by Dr Keigher and the Research Team is quite appropriate in the context of the objectives and the anticipated problems of data collection. However, the sampling procedures employed, if at all, for the staff of the SRO Hotel are not clearly defined. The number of managers; desk clerks; maids, bellmen; and janitors interviewed in each of the 27 sample SRO Hotels is not stated. Similarly, it is not clearly stated how the 900 persons screened from the 19 sites were actually selected in a 1988 Detroit Study by Douglas and Hodgkins. This problem raises some doubts in the representativeness of the sample, and the reliability and validity of data for the two studies. Perhaps this could account for the apparent over-representativeness of the black elderly homeless in the sample of the Detroit Study.

The studies have adequately articulated the economic, political and demographic factors contributing to the increasing shortage of affordable housing for poor elderly urban Americans. However there are no specific recommendations on how the problem could be solved, apart from making passionate appeals to the policy makers to re-define the housing policies and programmes. Perhaps this is another area for further research. Comparative housing policy studies at the city, state and national levels would be most appropriate. Comparative studies of America with countries in Europe could provide useful information on the policy strategies for housing elderly homeless Americans.

The two broad areas identified for further research in chapter 9 are essential against the backdrop of the inadequacies of the current knowledge base as exposed by the studies. Apart from seeking a better understanding of the incidence of homelessness and how the formal service agencies are coping with the problem, there is a need for future studies to focus more on the informal sources of services for the elderly homeless. The Detroit Study revealed that most black elderly homeless are willing to stay with relatives and the latter could be willing to provide the support. However, it is not clear under what conditions, if any, this support mechanism could work better for both the needy and the service providers.

Early this year, there was a heated debate in the South Korean Parliament and among the general public on the need to enact a law which could compel the children and close relatives to assist their needy parents. It was morally irreconcilable for the well-to-do adult children to abandon elderly parents at the time their support was most needed. Perhaps, such a debate is long overdue in the United States of America.

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