The African e-Journals Project has digitized full text of articles of eleven social science and humanities journals. This item is from the digital archive maintained by Michigan State University Library. Find more at: 
http://digital.lib.msu.edu/projects/africanjournals/

Available through a partnership with

Scroll down to read the article.
BOOK REVIEWS


Lwaano Lwanyika is a rarity: a delightful and scholarly book by a Zimbabwean anthropologist who has studied Tonga children since 1984 and a gifted Zimbabwean artist. There is a glowing introduction by Elizabeth Colson, a renowned authority on the Tonga.

The book is beautifully designed and illustrated, testifying to both authors' artistic sensibilities. This is appropriate, since the Tonga themselves are a most artistically gifted people. The pages are illustrated with lively black-and-white sketches in water-colour, pen-and-ink, pencil and charcoal, mainly by Cousins, and photographs by Alexander Joe. Jokes, stories, hand-written riddles and a number of visual techniques are used to attract and hold the reader's interest.

Although it is primarily aimed at the Tonga people themselves, this book should also interest academics. The material shows how traditional concerns and skills intersect with the new, even in one of the poorest groups of contemporary Africa. Material on kinship, religion and skills mingle without incongruity with analyses of the role of women, bureaucratic authority structures, issues of landownership, tourism and the importance of wise planning for development. Reynolds's own research interests in the extent and scope of indigenous knowledge, in cultural artifacts, in women, in health and healing, and in cognition as it manifests itself in riddles and folklore are clearly evident.

By seeking to give back to the people their cultural history and thus their destiny, the authors engage in the task, familiar to students of Freire and Cabral, of re-empowering people through education. The interest in indigenous knowledge is part of an attempt to re-invest with importance the small-scale and the locally relevant before they are wiped away by a universal curriculum, grandiose expectations and impractical schemes for development determined by a state with its own agenda.

This book is therefore not only about the Tonga people but for the Tonga. By addressing the people as subjects, it attempts to set right the

---

1 See P. Reynolds, Dance Civet Cat: Child Labour in the Zambezi Valley (Harare, Baobab Books; Ohio, Ohio Univ. Press. 1991).

2 Elizabeth Colson is the author of five monographs, Life among the Cattle-owning Plateau Tonga, The Material Culture of a Northern Rhodesia Native Tribe (Livingstone, Rhodes-Livingstone Museum, Occasional Papers 6, 1949), Marriage and the Family among the Plateau Tonga of Northern Rhodesia (Manchester, Manchester Univ. Press. 1958), Social Organization of the Gwembe Tonga (Manchester, Manchester Univ. Press. 1960), The Plateau Tonga of Northern Rhodesia (Manchester, Manchester Univ. Press. 1962), The Social Consequences of Resettlement: The Impact of the Kariba Resettlement upon the Gwembe Tonga (Manchester, Manchester Univ. Press, 1971), and numerous articles spanning nearly forty years of research on the Tonga people of Zambia.

3 See also P. Reynolds, Childhood in Crossroads: Cognition and Society in South Africa (Cape Town, David Philip, 1989).
historical wrongs done to a people who have for generations suffered the oppression, ridicule and incomprehension of other cultures. Under the respectful ethnographic description, the encoded message urges the Tonga to take upon themselves that task of self-determination. This book is produced in both English and ciTonga for that reason.

Nevertheless, there are improvements to be made. Although Reynolds tries to simplify her allusive and often poetic style the book will not, however, be found a uniformly easy read. The author’s voice is often that of scholar and poet, rather than pedagogue.

Some of the explanations of terms (as on pp. 203 and 216) are contentious. It should be made clear that these are not intended as dictionary definitions. Similarly, the sub-sections ‘Soul’ and ‘Body’ which appear in each of the three parts are given idiosyncratic meanings which astonish the unprepared reader. Editing has not been as thorough as one would have liked. The pictures and names of the potter and basket-weaver on pages 116–17 have been reversed and the mouse traps on pages 177–8 seem to have been wrongly labelled. The book has a useful bibliography but no index.

Harare

CAROLE PEARCE


Not only is it heartening to read a study set in the mode of the classics — an eloquent and educated use of words, and constellations of tables and diagrams where words may be confusing — but it is refreshing too. This study is short. In a mere 161 pages, including tables and diagrams, it pursues and achieves its goal: to unravel the complexities of a society in which the work of children is crucial, and to show that crux.

The author perceives at the outset that the approach to African farming used hitherto, that is, through household units ‘has been found wanting as it obscures women’s tactics, work and success as well as inter-house co-operation. As women tend to control child labour, it often obscures that too.’ Later on in the book the point is made that adults often do not actually know what the children really do, and that people routinely underestimate the amount of time that even they themselves spend working. The problem of condensing the findings of an awesomely diverse and detailed methodology has, I think, been well handled. Analysis of labour has to take account of so many things: seasonality, outputs, diversity of task; the list is endless. Wisely, virtually no statistical analysis has been attempted. Juxtaposed anecdotal and tabular approaches answer most of the questions a student or reader might have, without losing the thrust of the argument.

The importance of this study can hardly be overemphasized. At a time when African farming is once again under pressure to produce for the cash economy — and the Tonga people, subjects of this study, are more
under pressure than most — it illuminates the process of marginalization that serves to undervalue, and, perhaps because of this, to lose, the labour of women and children — to society’s cost. Indeed the study makes abundantly clear that this price is already being paid, mostly by women and children. The conclusion, that people must be allowed to live and grow in families, is not a trite one. It follows a study which reveals starkly how easily family structures can be subverted by external factors, such as the law. As life becomes more difficult for women it becomes positively dire for their daughters. And yet many of their problems derive from one of the central problems faced by the men of the area: ‘Ironically, they now have no guns nor the right to trap and hunt, although the population of game is higher and their lives are more directly threatened by game than in the last century’.

Perhaps is it too much to hope that, after such a splendid example, similar studies will now be undertaken for other societies. We can at least hope that it is the thin edge of a wedge: a firm opening has definitely been made here.

Dr Reynolds is very well served by her graphic designers and typesetters, though it is disappointing to see none of the promised photographs by the justly famous Alexander Joe. Editing does slip up sometimes: the elegant language and breadth of knowledge is marred, for instance, by reference to the language ‘kwaNdebele’. And one enormous failing is the lack of an index. All the same this is a book that no library on African sociology can afford to be without.

*Binga Development Association, Binga*


Bourdillon describes this book as being about one community of homeless people in Harare. He declares his own sympathies in the Introduction: the street people are ‘a group of people who found they had nowhere to go to, and no-one to help them, and who learnt to support each other in their poverty. It is a group who tried to help themselves, and who were constantly frustrated by wider society’ (p. 4). The book was written in order to try to correct the generally negative image of street people that exists in Zimbabwe by portraying them as resilient, creative people struggling to earn a living in an urban environment in which employment is difficult to find and in which housing, if it is available at all, is expensive.

To learn the true nature of the street people, particularly of the children who were seen as potential criminals, Bourdillon spent time with one particular homeless community which was moved several times by the authorities, sometimes brutally and frequently with little care for the people or their meagre possessions. He describes their attempts to develop a co-operative, the Street People’s Organization, and focuses on the personal stories of individual members of the community. They were a
mixed bunch — different ages, sexes, levels of education and abilities, and with different experiences of employment, alcohol, drugs and petty crime.

The book is largely descriptive and includes a brief history of the Street People’s Organization, which developed after one major eviction, and details of the various places where they settled. Bourdillon then focuses on the problems that face the community and suggests certain solutions, while making clear his own opinion on their causes.

One of the most compelling features of the book is the drive for survival that is implicit in the stories of the individuals who feature in it — in particular, their attempts to find ways to be independent and earn money, including by ‘minding cars’ — and the support that members of the community give each other. A number of key community characters, who are either formal or informal leaders, feature prominently throughout the book. In particular, Teddy Dende, a member with a disability who has had the longest experience of the city’s streets, seems to have developed a mutually beneficial patron–client relationship with many members of the community.

Many of the various authorities who feature in the stories, particularly the police, the local council and the Department of Social Welfare, are described with disdain. They appear to have no appreciation of the lives of Harare’s homeless, of the reasons why this group even exists, or of how to deal with the situation. Bourdillon notes that the frequent ‘round-ups’, the police harassment, the burning of homes and property, the treating of these homeless people as criminals and worse is totally out of keeping with the philosophy of a democratic and socialist government. While some appreciation is expressed for the work of officials in the lower echelons of various local and national government structures, the lack of communication with and sympathy from those in control is condemned.

Poor, Harassed but Very Much Alive is not intended to be an academic study of the homeless. Bourdillon has written a brief, easy-to-read account of the Street People’s Organization and the life and trials of the members of one community of homeless people. He succeeds in presenting a sympathetic account of members of this group, a group of people in need and struggling for survival but able to cope if they are given minimal support.

Harare

BRIGID WILLMORE


Celia Winter-Irving’s book is a major advance on the two books written so far on Zimbabwe’s world-renowned sculpture, those by Marion Arnold and Ferdinand Mor.1 As Winter-Irving points out, both of these works deal

1 M. I. Arnold, Zimbabwe Stone Sculpture (Bulawayo, Books of Zimbabwe, 1981); F. Mor, Shona Sculpture (Harare, The Author, 1987). See the essay reviews ‘Shona Sculpture’, Zambezia
essentially with Shona sculpture, and neither pays much attention to 'the thoughts and processes which have directed the artists' work'.

Winter-Irving attempts to go much further, to give 'an aerial view of Zimbabwe's visual culture', and to elucidate what can be learned 'from the links and connections between a variety of art practices, and from the ideologies, policies and activities of those institutions, organizations and individuals who have provided enlightened official, institutional, commercial, philanthropic, personal, and informal support for the visual arts in Zimbabwe since colonial times'. This is a massive project which goes well beyond the scope of the book's title, and, unfortunately, the book suffers because of it.

Australian-born Celia Winter-Irving, herself an artist and erstwhile director of a Sydney sculpture gallery, is now a Research Fellow at the National Gallery of Zimbabwe, and her loyalty to that institution is evident both in a long chapter on the Gallery itself and in her unwillingness to probe beneath the surface of what she relates of government policy.

Indeed, throughout this very patchily constructed book, the sharper edge of analysis is curiously lacking. The almost encyclopaedic attempt to contextualize the last thirty years' explosion of sculpture against earlier history, within traditional culture, among other contemporary visual arts, and in the stream of commerce (and there are useful but disembodied chapters on each of these), robs the analysis of focus. Thus Winter-Irving fails to make meaningful links between sculpture and nineteenth-century painting, or between Great Zimbabwe and modern Shona sculpture. Since she rightly insists that the sculpture has no overt cultural antecedents (the Zimbabwe birds hardly qualify), one wonders what purpose these chapters really serve, apart from exposing Winter-Irving's unfamiliarity with fields outside her own (such as the dated and stereotyped synopsis of 'militarist' Ndebele history, Mzilikazi being Shaka's 'general', and other inaccuracies).

The real value of the book lies, however, in the revelation of precisely that condition which makes focus difficult: that there is really no such thing as 'Shona sculpture': that the astonishing efflorescences of talent at Tengenenge and Chapungu Village are shot through with 'foreignness', both because many of the sculptors are not Zimbabwean at all and because, from its earliest days, the sculpture was fostered by White patrons with close connections with the worlds of academia, art-display and commerce. Nothing emerges more clearly here than the extraordinary variety of approaches to the craft.

Winter-Irving grapples sturdily with the non-question of whether Frank McEwen and Tom Blomefield's formative patronage has compromised some putative purity of 'traditional' cultural reference. Despite her own characterization of McEwen as 'highly selective', with 'strict quality control' (and in her contempt of 'airport' sculpture, she clearly supports this), she consistently falls back defensively on an often vaguely-articulated assertion of the cultural independence of the sculptors' works. In effect, though.

Winter-Irving demonstrates the futility of a 'Western vs. traditional' dispute: the sculpture has been produced at a time of massive cultural flux and culture-clash, which is precisely what generates its variety.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the 70-page section entitled 'The Sculptors Speak'. Although most of the sculptors are lucky to get a word in edgewise, this comes closest to the heart of what the book purports to be about; it is a pity the prose is often bafflingly loose, seldom closely tied to the illustrations, and sometimes grammatically wayward. This chapter also highlights the book's slightly disconcerting mixture of specialist interest (lists of exhibitions, for instance) and explanations which, at times, appear to be aimed at the layman.

Densely informative if not provocative, clearly if not profusely illustrated, *Stone Sculpture in Zimbabwe* is, for all its faults, a very welcome addition to the literature on the subject, a genuine foray towards a more holistic view than we have seen so far, and a genuine tribute to the individual sculptors. Paradoxically it demonstrates both how rich that subject is, and how much more fruitful analysis might be done.

*Rhodes University*  
D. Wylie