*Africa Since 1935*. Vol. 8

Corrine Lathrop Gilb

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/ccr](https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/ccr)

Recommended Citation

Available at: [https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/ccr/vol38/iss38/7](https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/ccr/vol38/iss38/7)
different societies of the African continent.

To those to whom these goals appeal I strongly recommend these volumes, preferably to be perused side by side.

*Ralph W. Brauer*

**NOTES**

1. The prevalence and validity of these opinions were lucidly examined for the case of the Mande blacksmiths of the lower Niger region by P. McNaughton in his book by the same title.

2. Different papers deal with one or another of these matters among the following: the Shona of Zimbabwe, the Barongo of northwestern Tanzania, the Fipa of Zambia and Tanzania, the Banjeli of northwestern Togo, the Luba of the Upamba depression in Zaire, the Haya of Uganda and Tanzania, and the Mandara and the Wandala of northern Cameroon.


An international committee of distinguished scholars began planning UNESCO's eight volumes on the history of Africa in 1964. The eighth volume has now been issued, in several languages, and so have eleven supplementary volumes on specialized topics. To cover adequately the history of such a large and complex continent, each of the eight volumes is twice the size of a normal book. This one is 1025 pages and the contributing writers are from 17 African countries, the Caribbean, the U.S.A., and Europe, yet each of the chapters dovetails nicely into a smoothly integrated whole.

Professor Ali A. Mazrui of Kenya, the principal editor, holds a D.Phil. degree from Oxford University and taught at SUNY-Binghamton and Cornell University, as well as at African universities. Author of numerous books and articles, he is at once
learned, lucid, thoughtful, and quietly passionate about “Africa's struggle to recover identity and defend its cultural dignity” (p. 118). His chapter about African science and technology is fiercely defensive. The book ends with his sad conclusion: “While Africa has been moving toward independence, others have walked on the moon.” However, he notes more than once: “South Africa under black majority rule may well become the first black nuclear power by the end of the twentieth century” (p. 125). Readers are reminded of Africa's warrior myth and the value of violence “as a therapeutic agent of historical progress.”

Completed in 1989, the book does not cover the end of apartheid in South Africa or the collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991. Former Marxist African governments were moving closer to the democratic West before the U.S.S.R. withdrew from empire.

The central drama in Africa from 1935 onward was the struggle to achieve political and economic independence. The former was achieved; the latter was not. “... the struggle for economic autonomy and cultural authenticity has only just begun” (p. 572). Not all the problems derive from neocolonialism. Mazrui writes: “To experience tyranny by Africans against Africans after experiencing the domination of Africans by white people is to learn about the universalism of rights and duties, and sin and redemption” (p. 573). “Rights and duties — if they are to be respected — need to be rooted in tradition and continuity.” Formerly, the rights of tradition and posterity were respected. “The shift from a culture of consensus to a culture of competition ... has proved to be devastating for human rights” (p. 464).

In his chapter on literature, Mazrui concludes: “African writers are caught up ... in the agonies of multiple estrangement — political, educational, linguistic, aesthetic, and technical.” Writers struggle to “recover their memory in the quest for ultimate renewal.” “The tension between the past and the present, tradition and modernity, are ultimately agonies of epochs across time. The tensions between the indigenous and the foreign are concerned with a dialectic across space.” Other tensions are between different sets of values. “But in the final analysis, it is the dialectic between the individual and society, on one side, and between society and universalism on the other, that lies at the heart of art itself. How
the human person relates to the immediate social group and how that social group relates to humanity itself together constitute the ultimate universe of aesthetic exploration. Senghor has called it 'the Civilization of the Universal'" (p. 574).

The 1930s were for Africa a period of underdevelopment and of emerging nationalism. "As the Second World War unfolded, Africa as a whole had to choose between imperialism under bourgeois liberalism and imperialism under the new menace of Nazism and fascism" (p. 107). Africa resisted fascism. When the Allies won the war, Ethiopia — liberated from Italian rule — was the sole fully independent African state. African soldiers had fought for the Allies. Returning home, they expected some reward. The colonial powers offered modest reforms — more development, more black participation — while liberation movements gained strength among Africans. The colonial powers tried regional federations, but these did not stem the surge toward independence.

During the war and immediately after, Islam was more a moral than a political factor. Socialism was perceived merely as one way of achieving nationalism. Colonel Nasser's advent to power in Egypt in 1952 made a significant difference, committed as he was to theistic socialism, panArabism, and panAfricanism. His seizure of the Suez Canal became a symbol of the principle of African control over African resources. The Algerian revolution between 1954 and 1962 was another landmark.

African colonies did gain their political independence. It took Salazar's fall in Portugal in 1974 to free the Portuguese colonies. Because of its large white population, Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) continued as a colony until 1980. Namibia remained under South African rule until later.

For many of these new states, the state preceded the nation. There were no common values, beliefs, or attitudes to undergird the state. The need was for substantial cultural homogenization but in only a few countries was there ideological consensus. Every new African state was ethnically divided. Ethnic groups failed to accept the legitimacy of the state and identify with it as a symbol of the nation (p. 439). Ethnic pluralism led to civil wars and secessionism. It also led to bloated bureaucracies as each group wanted a share of the pie.
The new Westernized elites had been schooled in authoritarian colonial political culture. At first, the goal of many was parliamentary democracy. In the face of turbulence, rapidly expanding bureaucracies were seen as instruments for political control. Would-be parliamentary democracies gave way to military autocracies. In the 1970s “Marxism-feminism attained a high profile” which lasted until the late 1980s (p. 495). Africa was buffeted by the rivalries of the international Cold War. However, ethnicity in Africa was far stronger than class consciousness. Collectivism in Africa had been based on ritual, not a common structure. There developed “a chasm between post-colonial institutions and the ability to control them effectively” (p. 922).

“Bertrand Russell once said that civilization was born out of the pursuit of luxury” (p. 652). By this measure the new ruling elites were very civilized. Corruption was rampant.

Africa persisted in a state of dependency and underdevelopment. It “failed at that modernization upon which it counted for world respect” (Chinweizu, Nigeria, p. 787). One of the problems was that capitalism came to Africa “without the 'Protestant ethic' of work and frugality” (p. 493). By 1984, much of sub Saharan Africa was unable to feed itself; food had to be imported. Millions were starving and dying.

Natural disasters were partly to blame. The climate was increasingly variable. Deserts were advancing in several parts of the continent. Livestock died in droughts. Irrigation was often unfeasible. Soils were thin.

Social and cultural factors were also to blame. Eighty to ninety percent of the farmers worked small-scale holdings. A majority of them were women. Farming was not respected. International assistance tended to go to the small male-dominated cash-crop sector. Socialized agriculture in Tanzania, Ghana, and Mozambique was an economic disaster.

Even if agriculture had been successful, food supplies were overwhelmed by the high birth rate. Population tripled between 1950 and 1980. Africa had the highest birth rate in the world. By 1980 Africa was still the least industrialized continent in the world. Foreign capital, expertise, technology, and entrepreneurship were still dominant despite a large number of national takeovers of companies in the 1960-1974 period and despite a
period of protectionism and attempted import substitution. Transportation and marketing were major bottlenecks. More important was the lack of skills. In Nigeria, this book explains, the leaders were from the non-producer sections of the colonial bourgeois. Corrupt mandarins interested in conspicuous consumption, they were addicted to dependency. They were not interested in capital accumulation for investment. In 1978 imports of manufactures were still over 60 percent of Africa's imports.

Since arms were imported, there was "no symbiotic relation between defense and development" (p. 922), as there was in the United States. Africa had tried regional "common markets" and had joined the other less developed countries' efforts to force changes in the international economic order that American leaders had put into place after World War II, but with little success. The terms of trade were not good for commodity experts. Despite its oil, uranium, and other minerals, Africa depended on its dessert and beverage commodity exports. OPEC had shown what a commodity cartel could do, but the European Union's Lome conventions in 1975, 1979, and 1984 put restrictions on the formation of commodity cartels in former colonies while giving Europe special access to Africa.

Africa wanted modernity, but modernity was identified with Westernization. Universities such as Dakar, Ibadan, and Makerere were pinnacles of Western-style education, but they did not prepare Africans to do advanced research. In traditional Africa, higher education was mainly for rulers and priests. Africa still has a high rate of illiteracy.

Africa has had a hard time trying to walk the fine line between borrowing from the outside for cultural enrichment and being culturally dominated; "...members of the new black bourgeoisie are mainly allies of external foreign interests ... cultural penetration includes the prevalence of a consumer culture, the persistence of a colonial educational structure, the infiltration of African societies by alien information media, and electronic services, and the survival of language policies which serve the interests of elite and ruling classes are inadequately sensitive to the needs of the masses. The continuing dominance of elite culture in Africa by foreign languages becomes symptomatic of this deep-seated cultural dependency" (p. 572).
From 1926 onward, Europeans were in the forefront of research on African languages and culture; since the 1960s, independent international organizations and foreign countries have kept it alive. Because of Africans' emphasis on oral tradition, "every time an old man dies, a library goes up in flames" (p. 530). The market for African writers is poor because of the multiplicity of native dialects and languages and because many Africans cannot read European languages. Yet, Tanzania newspapers have a "Poems to the Editor" section. African music and art have influenced the world.

PanAfricanism has gone through several states. For some, it means the mystique of the black race and includes the whole black diaspora. For others, it means the political unity of the African territorial continent, perhaps a United States of Africa. The rulers of Ghana and Kenya were early leaders. The Organization of African Unity was formed in Addis Ababa in May 1963. After 1952 panAfricanism overlapped with panArabism. OPEC transformed Nigeria into a pivotal state. Recently (after this book was written), black South Africa has developed plans to unite Africa through infrastructure. Clearly, this book does not consider white men to be Africans even though some white groups have lived in Africa for over 300 years.

Mazrui concludes that the two most important revolutions to come are the gender revolution in roles and the scientific revolution in skills. By the 1950s, there was already a division between the male proletariat and the female peasantry. The mechanization of some agriculture has further marginalized women. However, women are being admitted to the military, and there have been female diplomats. Most of all, Africans need to learn new scientific and organizational skills, perhaps drawing in part upon pre-Western knowledge.

This book — abundant in details, illustrations, maps, charts, and tables — is well worth buying and, even more, well worth reading.

Corinne Lathrop Gilb