

Z A Konczacki, J L Parpart and T M Shaw, *Studies in the Economic History of Southern Africa*, Vol. One: *The Front-line States*, London, Frank Cass, 1990, 228pp.

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It is encouraging to see a work that attempts to provide an economic history of Southern Africa, a region that has been unusually, but unequally, integrated through labour migration, colonial customs unions and federations, post-independence regional development schemes, and struggles against European settler rule. Since the 'Mineral Revolution' of the late nineteenth century, South Africa has been the regional metropole, sucking labour from the other countries, and exporting colonisers, capital, terror and destruction to them. The temptation for scholars writing the history of Southern Africa has been to equate the region with South Africa, and only make passing references to the rest of the countries. The editors of this volume have saved us from this South African scholarly sub-imperialism. This volume examines the economic histories of Angola, Mozambique, Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Botswana. We are promised that Volume Two will look at South Africa itself, Lesotho and Swaziland.

But the spectre of South Africa has not been entirely banished, for this volume is on 'The Frontline States', the loose regional grouping based on its opposition to South Africa's apartheid policies in the 1980s. There are some wrinkles here. Malawi was never part of it. Also, it means that this is not really an integrated regional economic history, like Hopkins' *Economic History of West Africa* (Longman, 1973), but a disparate collection of country histories conveniently put under two covers. The editors missed an opportunity in their introduction to set out the salient features of Southern Africa's economic history. They make a few flimsy statements on the global changes taking place at the end of the 1980s and trite comments on economic historiography.

Interestingly, two of the editors do not even have a chapter in the book. The third has one, which seeks to present an overview of the socio-economic formations of the Southern African Iron Age. It combines dated interpretations on the nature of the region's economies and states and petty theorising on modes of production. The author does not seem to have read many of the recent publications by some of the region's leading historians. With this dispensable background chapter, the book proceeds to deal with the colonial and post-independence periods. This perpetuates the

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old myth of imperialist historiography that there is little history in Africa before the coming of the Europeans.

This is largely an economic history of state policies, both colonial and post-independence, despite the Marxist pretensions of many of the authors. Many of the chapters are either silent on, or inadequately incorporate the role of workers, peasants, women, the informal sectors, and the environment in their analyses. Moreover, with a few exceptions, the papers are not based on primary research. Despite this, some of them are informative and well-written.

Seleti offers a particularly well-researched contribution on the development of dependent capitalism in Portuguese Africa. He elaborates on the well-known argument that Portugal's own poverty conditioned its imperial mission, and ensured that foreign capital would play an exceptionally large role in its colonies, a dilemma that persisted, and Seleti demonstrates convincingly, even deepened, after the rise in 1926 of the corporatist *Estado Novo*, bent on pursuing economic nationalism. The paper ably analyses the changes in the overall structure and the various sectors of the colonial economies of Angola and Mozambique, up to the end of the Portuguese empire in the early 1970s.

Also vigorously argued is Burdette's paper on industrial development in Zambia, Zimbabwe and Malawi. She compares the processes and patterns of industrial growth among the three countries from the beginning of colonial rule to the late 1980s. She contends that 'the politics of industrialisation are as important as the physical resources' (p. 120), and attributes Zimbabwe's relatively early, faster, and more extensive industrialisation, not simply to the availability of mineral resources, but primarily to the emergence of a settler national bourgeoisie and the interests of the evolving imperial system. Zimbabwe's industrialisation accelerated when the three territories were federated in 1953, as Harare drained huge sums from Zambia's Copperbelt and labour supplies from Malawi. But Malawi, as recent research has shown, was not simply a labour reservoir, it was itself a large importer of migrant labour, especially from Mozambique, for its colonial plantations. Moreover, it is rather simplistic to state that the 'traditional economies were destroyed directly and indirectly by the intrusion of capitalism' (p.77). It is also not clear why the settlers in Zimbabwe constituted a national bourgeoisie while those in Zambia did not. The rest of the paper discusses industrial policies, developments, and constraints, in each of the three territories after independence, and in the case of Zambia, deindustrialisation following the collapse of the copper market in the mid-1970s and adoption of structural adjustment programmes in the 1980s.

Far less satisfactory is Good's chapter on the agricultural development in the same three countries. He theorises on the 'weak underdevelopmental' post-colonial states of Malawi and Zambia, and eulogises the 'strong',

'developmental' settler colonial state in Zimbabwe, which not only promoted European farmers, but also, we are told, 'emergent' black farmers. The story of colonial agriculture in Zimbabwe seems to be one of impressive growth and little conflict. Reading Good one would not understand why Zimbabwean peasants fought a protracted guerrilla war. The assertion that the colonial state in Malawi only 'intervened fitfully' in the economy is simply not true. The effort to differentiate the rural population is commendable, but the categories used are airy, borrowed as they are from the World Bank. He correctly dismisses the 'economy of affection' model, but uncritically embraces the 'rational choice' approach.

Murray and Parsons tell the fascinating story of Botswana, the 'fastest growing economy in Africa' as posters in government buildings in Gaborone proudly proclaim. The colonial period was one long stretch of neglect and poverty. Migrant labour was the mainstay of the economy. Until independence the colony's capital was even located in South Africa, and there were no government primary or secondary schools. Miraculously, in the next two decades, the economy grew thirty-fold. The renegotiation of the Customs Agreement with South Africa in 1969 helped, and so did the recovery and expansion of the beef industry. But the real motor of Botswana's phenomenal economic growth came with the discovery of rich deposits of diamonds and other minerals. Murray and Parsons examine the impact that this 'mineral revolution' has had on the various sectors of the economy and society. They argue that the economy faces two major problems: rising unemployment and how to turn mineral-led growth, which is beginning to level out, into broad-based and sustainable development.

The last chapter by Longmire is the shortest. Perhaps reflecting the fact that it was written before Namibia's independence, it concentrates on the problems of land alienation and labour exploitation, first by the Germans, then by South Africa, which after 1947 virtually swallowed the country, so that it soon ceased producing separate statistical information on Namibia. A tentative analysis is made of the key sectors, from agriculture and fishery, to mining, trade and investment. Longmire also briefly discusses the role of the United Nations and SWAPO in the liberation struggle. His conclusion that 'independence is unlikely in the present circumstances' (p.221) shows that divining the future is an art best left to soothsayers, not scholars, let alone historians. Namibia got its independence at the same time that this book was being published.