Many have been the moments in history when Ethiopia attracted more than its fair share of global attention. In 1896, it astounded the world by coming out victorious over the Italian invading forces, thereby reversing in emphatic fashion the tide of colonial rule. In 1935, it evoked worldwide solidarity as the first victim of the Fascist aggression that was to evolve four years later into the conflagration of the Second World War. In 1984, a devastating famine moved the world into a massive show of solidarity through mobilization for relief and an iconic song involving almost all the known pop stars. Nowadays, the country is lauded as one of the fastest growing African economies, even if its human rights record is not without blemishes.

Just as it has evoked popular interest over the decades, Ethiopia has been the subject of scholarly attention since at least the nineteenth century. It is one of the few countries that have been the object of triennial international conferences. Appropriately enough in view of the pre-eminent position of Italian scholars, the first of the series was held in Rome in 1959; the 19th took place in Warsaw in 2015. As the editors note at the beginning of the volume, it also has the rare distinction of being the subject of a five-volume encyclopaedia (Encyclopaedia Aethiopica) dedicated to almost everything that pertains to it.

Yet, all the above notwithstanding, Ethiopia remains a paradox, a land of contradictions. Controversy has been the hallmark of its history. The founder of modern Ethiopia, Emperor Menelik II (r. 1889-1913), was as much admired by Pan-Africanists and venerated by Pan-Ethiopians as he has been detested by the spokespersons of submerged nationalities. Emperor Haile Sellassie (r. 1930-1974) had been the object of global adulation since his historic and prophetic speech at the League of Nations in 1936. Yet, he became the target of virulent student protests that eventually cost him his throne in 1974. His eventual successor, Mengistu Haile Mariam, much as his followers admired his ruthless leadership, has come down in history as the architect of a terror that wiped out a generation. Finally, Meles Zenawi, the person who has left his indelible imprint on contemporary Ethiopia, has had his equal share of admirers and detractors.

Given this historical backdrop, it is not easy to come out with a balanced account of the history, politics and economics of the country. Marshalling the expertise of a number of scholars, the editors have succeeding in doing that to a considerable degree. The country’s demographics, religious distribution, the forging of the modern empire-state, the defining nature of the 1974 revolution, the growth of regional and ethno-nationalist insurgency in the north, the controversial experiment in ethnic federalism since 1991, the vexed question of elections, the country’s emergence as a regional hegemon, its much-vaunted economic performance, the evolution of the capital Addis Ababa, and the personality and legacy of Meles Zenawi are all treated in sixteen well-researched chapters. A generous supply of good quality maps helps to illustrate the narrative considerably. As the editors themselves acknowledge, what is missing is a treatment of the cultural scene.

A collection of this nature is bound to be not so easy to review as the chapters have varying levels of expertise and erudition, not to speak of objectivity and conscientiousness. But, with the exception of one or two chapters, the overall result is the production of a work that could serve as a handy companion to all those who wish to understand contemporary Ethiopia.

Religion has been a defining element of Ethiopian life. Christianity was introduced in the early fourth century, much earlier than in some parts of Western Europe. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church, member of the Eastern Orthodox brand that has held sway in Russia, Eastern Europe and the Middle East, has been the prevalent form of religious affiliation for centuries. It inspired some of the enduring architectural legacies of the country. It was also the repository of advanced forms of ecclesiastical art and illuminated manuscripts of artistic and historical value. Buttressed by the state, it served at the same time as its propaganda arm. It was also the state that finally resolved in 1878 the doctrinal controversies that had threatened to tear it apart. Administratively, the Church remained subservient to the Coptic Church based in Alexandria (Egypt), which had invested itself with the authority to appoint the head of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the abun. This state of affairs persisted until 1959, when the Ethiopian Church became autocephalous with the consecration of Abuna Baselyos as the first Ethiopian Patriarch. In the wake of the 1974 Revolution, the Church was disestablished, forfeiting its privileged status and the huge revenue it used to get from its landed property. But, as the relevant chapter in the book under review clearly shows, the state continued and still continues to monitor closely its
activities, notably the appointment of the patriarch.

Islam, to which some 34 per cent of Ethiopians currently adhere, first came to Ethiopia even faster after its birth than Christianity did. The persecuted followers of the Prophet Mohammed sought protection and asylum in Ethiopia. Widespread conversion, facilitated through trade rather than imposed by the sword, had to wait until the beginning of the second millennium, however. The royal patronage that the Church enjoyed throughout the centuries meant that Islam and Muslims remained largely marginalized. As in all other spheres of life, the 1974 Revolution changed this situation, Islam being granted an equal status and the three remaining to be observed during national holidays. In more recent times, official recognition has graduated into revivalism and accommodation has given way to confrontation. Rather crude government efforts to contain Islamic revivalism have produced a period of uncertainty and instability.

Orthodoxy has not been the only brand of Christianity in Ethiopia. Both Catholicism and Protestantism have deep roots. The former goes back to the late eleventh and early twelfth century, when a reigning monarch’s ill-conceived attempt to convert to it unleashed a ferocious civil war, culminating in the monarch’s abdication and a ban on Catholic missionaries that lasted for three centuries. In the nineteenth century, in tandem with developments elsewhere in Africa, there was an influx of both Catholic and Protestant missionaries and the conversion of a large number of Ethiopians to both denominations. Catholicism had its stronghold in parts of northern and eastern Ethiopia while Protestantism came to prevail in the western and southern parts. The pertinent chapter in the book, concentrating as it does on the Pentecostal brand of Protestantism, hardly does justice to this history, for to a lesser degree, the Pentecostalism that is equated with Evangelism, Orthodox Qes Gudina Tumsa nor Radio Voice of the Gospel had anything to do with Pente. The Pente may have been the most vocal of the followers of this church, but they have certainly not been the most significant in the long durée.

As so often, it is the political realm that would attract the reader’s greatest attention. And the volume under review does not disappoint in this regard. Modern Ethiopian history, which historians agree starts with the coronation of Emperor Tewodros II in 1855 and attains its dénouement with the emperor’s abdication and a ban on Protestantism, hardly does justice to this period. That victory guaranteed Ethiopian independence and thereby paved the way to the Italian occupation of the highlands. Barely a year later, the Italians proclaimed their colony of Eritrea, opening a contentious chapter in the history of the region that has not yet been closed.

In the end, Menilek proved to be the most successful of the nineteenth century monarchs. His submission in 1878 was in effect a blessing in disguise. For he could concentrate on the expansion of his realm to the less contested southern half of the country. In a series of dazzling military campaigns that combined force with diplomacy, he was able to extend the frontiers of his kingdom but also to accumulate the resources that made his eventual submission to the throne a foregone conclusion. Ethiopia as we know it today is largely an outcome of these acts of mutual extermination. It was, however, power that he drew for us is one of a ‘supreme personality of its leader, Meles Zenawi. As already indicated above, the volume constitutes a useful handbook for those who wish to understand contemporary Ethiopia, as its title promises. If there are to be any future editions of the book, however, some chapters have to be revisited. This review has underscored the seminal importance of the 1974 Revolution to understanding Ethiopia. Yet, the chapter that is devoted to it is marred by many factual and chronological errors – too many to enumerate in a review of this nature. Likewise, if to a lesser degree, the chapter on the ‘Eritrean Question’ also needs a close second look. Addis Ababa, which has been interpreted as an African metropolis, also deserves a much more thorough and comprehensive treatment.

The overlooked cultural section in this volume has to be filled in. After all, Ethiopia is known not only for its leaders – from Menilek to Meles – but also for its athletes – from Abebe Bikila to Haile Gebrselassie, from Genzebe Dibaba. If such rectifications are made, the volume has the potential of being an even more useful handbook than it currently is.
Higher Education Leadership and Governance in the Development of the Creative and Cultural Industries in Kenya

Emily Achieng’, Donald Otoyo, Peter L. Barasa, Simon Peter, Charity Muraguri Wamuyu and Maurice Okutoyi Amateshe

The role of higher education in establishing structures and procedures in society and industry is clearly articulated in scholarly discussions. The narrative has recently taken a new momentum in Kenya with the acknowledgement of the creative industry, a field that involves many youth, as an area that impacts on the economy. In unravelling the link between higher education and industry, the authors focus on leadership and governance in higher education and its expected and perceived contribution to the shaping of the creative industry. Through analysis of five cases, the authors interrogate the processes and structures that govern the teaching and practice of the creative subjects, noting how these affect the creative industry in Kenya. This book approaches the creative disciplines from the perspectives of the students, lecturers and university administrators. The three voices provide a balanced view of what higher creative arts education in Kenya is. The multiple authorship of the book further provides a balanced account of the development of these disciplines in higher education, and their growth in industry. The key concepts here are the development of the creative industry and how higher education should contribute to the same.

Pages: 244

Managing and Transforming an African University

A Personal Experience at Makerere University, 1973–2004

John Pancras Mukusa Ssebulwulu

Makerere is one of the oldest and most enduring African educational institutions. Initially established in 1922 as a technical school by the Department of Education under the British Protectorate Government, and converted to a university in 1970, it has survived many odds and emerged as a true centre of academic excellence whose impact extends far beyond the borders of Uganda and Africa. Makererians are found all over the world, many with successful careers. The institution has provided Uganda, East Africa, Africa and the world with high quality professionals in such fields as Medicine, Engineering, the Arts and the Sciences. This book chronicles the experience of Makerere University’s eighth Vice Chancellor; a former student and one of the institution’s longest-serving members of staff. It provides a vivid account of his stewardship, over a period of three decades from 1973 to 2004, and highlights the challenges of managing an African university. The book is a rich historical document and a valuable educational material.

Pages: 264

Transition from Slavery in Zanzibar and Mauritius

Abdul Sheriff, Vijayalakshmi Teeelock, Saada Omar Wahab and Satyendra Peerthum

This book presents a comparative history of slavery and the transition from slavery to free labour in Zanzibar and Mauritius, within the context of a wider comparative study of the subject in the Atlantic and Indian Ocean worlds. Both countries are islands, with roughly the same size of area and populations, a common colonial history, and both are multicultural societies. However, despite inhabiting and using the same oceanic space, there are differences in experiences and structures which deserve to be explored. In the nineteenth century, two types of slave systems developed on the islands – while Zanzibar represented a variant of an Indian Ocean slave system, Mauritius represented a variant of the Atlantic system – yet both flourished when the world was already under the hegemony of the global capitalist mode of production. This comparison, therefore, has to be seen in the context of their specific historical conjunctures and the types of slave systems in the overall theoretical conception of modes of production within which they manifested themselves, a concept that has become unfashionable but which is still essential. The starting point of many such efforts to compare slave systems has naturally been the much-studied slavery in the Atlantic region which has been used to provide a paradigm with which to study any type of slavery anywhere in the world. However, while Mauritian slavery was 100 per cent colonial slavery, slavery in Zanzibar has been described as ‘Islamic slavery’. Both established plantation economies, although with different products, Zanzibar with cloves and Mauritius with sugar, and in both cases, the slaves faced a potential conflictual situation between former masters and slaves in the post-emancipation period.

Pages: 808

Les sciences sociales au Sénégal

Mise à l’épreuve et nouvelles perspectives

Sou la direction de Mamadou Diouf et Souleymane Bachir Diagne

La rencontre qui s’organise en ce livre de disciplines et thématiques diverses manifeste le mouvement, aujourd’hui, de la recherche académique en sciences sociales au Sénégal. Différentes ethnographies et sociologies, spécifiques à chaque situation examinée, sont présentées dans les textes ici réunis, qui inaugurent et affichent, tout à la fois, une conversation autant soucieuse de précision empirique qu’attentive aux problématiques théoriques, épistémologiques et méthodologiques. Ainsi, dans leur manière de restituer avec rigueur aussi bien la diversité des communautés et des acteurs que la complexité des situations et des thèmes examinés, les différents chapitres ont valeur d’exemplaires. La cohérence de l’ouvrage tient aux procédures mises en œuvre dans chaque contribution : la collecte la plus complète et la plus rigoureuse possible des données et des sources disponibles ; leur traitement en recourant aux théories et méthodes scientifiques, quantitatives et qualitatives les plus éprouvées et, finalement, une présentation claire et précise des résultats obtenus. Aucune ne s’enferme dans une réflexion exclusivement académique. Le souci de trouver des solutions pratiques aux problèmes examinés est fortement présent. Chaque texte est exemplaire en ce sens qu’il propose un exemple de ce que sont aujourd’hui les humanités et les sciences sociales sur notre continent lorsqu’elles sont attachées à penser les devoirs à l’œuvre dans la modernité africaine, sénégalaise plus particulièrement. C’est à ce titre qu’ils se font écho dans leur manière de proposer, ensemble, un profil de cette modernité en mouvement.

ISBN : 978-2-86978-709-4
Pages : 264