

BOOK REVIEWS

Stig Jarle Hansen. *Al-Shabaab in Somalia. The history and ideology of a militant Islamist group, 2005-2012*. London: Hurst & Company, 2013, 195 pp, ISBN 9781849042505.

Some books are important; some are frustrating; some are both important and frustrating at the same time. Stig Hansen's recent book on the Somali jihadi book *Al-Shabaab* falls in the latter category.

Al-Shabaab remains, as of mid-2013, one of the most dangerous jihadi groups in the world. Though the movement is much weaker than it was at its peak in 2008, it still possesses the capacity to launch significant terrorist attacks in Somali and East Africa. The group has been the subject of a flood of studies and analyses, mainly by counter-terrorism experts with limited knowledge of Somalia. Only a handful of analyses – reports by International Crisis Group and the UN Monitoring Group on Somalia, and studies produced by analysts with close knowledge of Somalia, such as Roland Marchal, Andre Le Sage, and Matt Bryden, have been able to provide close, contextually rich assessment of the group.

Hansen's new book is thus a very welcome contribution to the literature on a movement that is at once incredibly important and yet very poorly understood. *Al-Shabaab in Somalia* stands out in several respects. It is the first book length study of *Al-Shabaab*; it is by far the most detailed study of the group; it draws on actual interviews with *al-Shabaab* members; and it is written by a scholar whose deep understanding of Somalia, and fluency in both Somali and Arabic, give him a powerful perch from which to produce a nuanced assessment of the group.

Hansen advances a number of theses in his study, some more or less conventional, others revisionist. One of the most persistent themes is the claim that *al-Shabaab* is much stronger and more cohesive than most recent analyses have allowed for. Since 2011, the group's well-documented internal problems – leadership rivalries, tensions between Somali and foreign jihadis, clan tensions and defections, and general decline in public support, all exacerbated by *al-Shabaab*'s poor decision-making on everything from battlefield tactics against the better-equipped African Union forces in Mogadishu, to its disastrous mishandling of the 2011 famine – have led many observers to conclude the group is fading. Hansen makes a strong case for why announcement

of the group's demise is premature, and documents al-Shabaab's internal resilience, especially that of its intelligence wing, al-Amniyat, which now forms the core of al-Shabaab's new decentralized, clandestine terrorist network strategy. The fact that a major armed conflict within al-Shabaab's ranks exploded in June 2013 might appear to negate Hansen's thesis, but for now it is too soon to tell.

The greatest strength of the book is unquestionably its command of rich detail on al-Shabaab, especially Hansen's careful monitoring of media reports since 2004. This feature alone makes it an essential resource for anyone studying Somali politics and society or Islamic violent extremism. The author's phone interviews with al-Shabaab figures turn out to be somewhat less revealing than many would wish, but this is hardly surprising. The overall tone of his analysis is a bit less critical of al-Shabaab than many readers will find acceptable – the most egregious aspects of the group's violent tactics, some of which have even been condemned in al-Qaeda's own correspondence, get a light touch.

The book is also a frustrating read. General readers with little background on Somalia will get lost in the flood of unexplained allusions. Readers looking for clearly articulated theses may also find their patience tested; the details loaded into the text are often left unharnessed by a thesis, forcing the reader to deduce what it all means. In some sections of the book, Hansen seems unwilling to reach a conclusion based on his evidence – the word 'perhaps' may be used in this book more than any other printed work in recent years. When the author does choose to make firm and clear claims, they are - ironically - often poorly documented, eroding confidence in the finding. A stronger editorial hand with the manuscript could have easily fixed these problems and allowed the book to tap the full potential of Hansen's strong knowledge of this material.

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David 'Tosh' Gitonga (Director). *Nairobi Half Life*, 2012.
Film Review.

Nairobi Half Life screened in Melbourne and Sydney earlier this year as the opening night film of the African Film Festival, a fantastic addition to the Australian arts scene now in its second year. As the first Kenyan

film to be entered into the 'Best Foreign Language' category at the Oscars, and the recipient of nine nominations at the African Movie Academy Awards, *Nairobi Half Life* is the most successful Kenyan film of all time. As someone with a great love of the city of Nairobi, perhaps I should confess that my sympathies for this film are coloured by my somewhat sentimental predisposition towards its subject matter. Nevertheless, there is much to commend about it.

With high production values, outstanding acting, comedic appeal and good narrative pace, this film is a great watch, and was well received by audiences at the festival. The film tells the tale of Mwas (Joseph Wairimu), a naïve youth who travels to Nairobi to pursue his dream of becoming a famous actor. Immediately upon disembarking from the bus, however, Mwas discovers not the thrills of big city lights, but the unrelentingly harsh realities of 'Nairobierry.' As a series of misadventures ensue, the talented Wairimu elicits great sympathy from the audience as we follow Mwas on his quest to balance a life of hustling in Gaza, a Nairobi slum, with his nascent acting career.

From the tag line 'Have we chosen to be what we are?' to the cinematography that so vividly captures Nairobi (half) life, to the narrative itself, the film explores a number of key themes: rural-urban migration and familial ties (the good and the bad); elitism and class; and state, especially police corruption and extortion. Resting a story on a spate of bad luck and small (and big) injustices is a strategy that can be often frustratingly untenable. But, as anyone who knows Nairobi will testify, it is entirely believable in this context.

Perhaps because the film is made in Kenya, by Kenyans, it succeeds in striking a fine balance in its portrayal of the good and the bad of Nairobi. The film does well to capture the vibrant arts scene that is one of the city's greatest assets, while simultaneously critiquing the elitist character of this scene. The film is at its best, though, in its portrayal of the vulnerability, precariousness and capriciousness of slum life, while also celebrating the friendships that make such a life bearable. The film confronts the audience with the heart-breaking realities of the acute vulnerability experienced by people who, because they lack the money and the necessary connections, have no buffer with which they can protect themselves against the unpredictable and difficult to navigate challenges of urban poverty. As a salve to this difficult to bear side of the film, the portrayal of the development of a friendship between Mwas and the lead support character, Oti, captures the generosity and solidarity that so often functions to keep young men in these circumstances afloat. The risk of glossing the tense realities of

relationships forged under such difficult circumstances is mitigated by the film's treatment of the posturing, jealousy and competition that characterise such (and perhaps all) friendships, and the representation of deteriorating and fracturing relationships between gangs in Gaza provides an important corrective to any romanticisation of camaraderie.

Though it deals with gritty and heartbreaking themes with a sense of humour, the film doesn't quite combine drama and comedy as smoothly as other films in the genre, such as the much lauded *Slumdog Millionaire*, to which it is easily compared. The film can be a bit clichéd at times, for example in its overly-explicated engagement of the tag line. Though its humorous moments are well constructed in and of themselves, they threaten at points to undermine the gravity of the wider tale. Some of the crime scenes in particular were dramatically mishandled, too easily read by the audience as a farcical romp, with an awkward transition towards the dramatic final scenes.

Nevertheless, the film does well to explore the tension between structure and agency in determining the limits of people's capacity to 'choose what they are.' *Nairobi Half Life* demonstrates the great potential of the genre, and of local filmmakers, for capturing, critiquing and celebrating aspects of life in Africa's cities in multi-dimensional and captivating ways. Congratulations are due to the organisers of the film festival for bringing such films to Australian audiences.

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Stefan Blum. *Elites, Coercion and Collective Goods A Rational Choice Explanation of Variations in Violence in East Africa (Uganda, Tanzania and Zanzibar).* Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2011, 245pp, ISBN 9783832960148.

In this book, the author presents the post-independence political and economic development situation of Uganda and Tanzania, with Zanzibar as part of Tanzania but also given equally in-depth analysis. The argument and data presented are helpful in understanding the forces that have influenced the current trend of development in these territories in the post-independence period.

The literature review reveals that Uganda has been characterized by ethnic violence in which religion is often embedded; much of the country has enjoyed stability under the current regime with the

exception of northern Uganda. While mainland Tanzania compared to Uganda throughout the post-independence period remained relatively stable, conflicts nonetheless increased when multiparty democracy was introduced in 1992. As to Zanzibar, after a short experience of strong violence in 1963-4, it has remained relatively calm, while however experiencing “severe party or elite conflicts involving small scale violence.” The author claims that the violence in northern Uganda and Zanzibar is “highly policy relevant,” making the study’s findings and recommendations a major contribution to the policy discourse in the region (pp.73-74).

At independence, of the two countries Uganda and Tanzania, the former had the most promising case for post-colonial success. Uganda had a “fairly prosperous” economy, while Tanzania was divided and the “poorest” economy in the region. The author observes what happened to independent Uganda a few decades after independence, i.e. it was caught in “political disorder, social chaos and worse.” Therefore, an explanation of variations in violence between these two countries is at the core of this investigation. In most parts of Uganda, the author correctly states that the return of peace runs concurrently with continuing insurgency in northern Uganda. Although Tanzania was the poorest and most divided country at independence, it remained stable even after President Julius Nyerere’s death. Tanzania also helped to stop the violence in Zanzibar and established order on the island (p.18).

To explain these variations, the author “heuristically” applies a statistical model developed within the World Bank project on civil war by Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler (CH). According to the author, this model has been widely accepted within the development discourse as a multinational empirical study of civil war and it is based on rational choice, an economic foundation of the assumptions regarding human behavior. The principle tenant of CH is an important correlation between a primary commodities’ exports/GDP-variable and civil war onset – where primary commodities were found to be more important than democracy or related aspects (pp.20-21). While the model is helpful in investigating country level differences in violence, as well as calculating variations over time, the author argues that the model is not adequate in explaining sub-national/regional variations of violence in Tanzania and Uganda because of definitional parameters (p.118). Most importantly, the East African context does not support CH’s theoretical argument that availability of natural resources was a critical determinant of civil war probability, hence suggesting a potentially “spurious correlations” (p.119).

The author provides insights into how a small group of identity-based political elites may be able to dominate the state, making large scale political violence unlikely. The author suggests that a case in point was the strong elite that President Museveni created in the 1980s largely out of his own ethnic groups (p.183). Similarly, Nyerere in Tanzania recruited his elite from a wide range of ethnic groups, but sharing a common religion (Christianity). The author argues that the Tanzanian “model” was far more successful than the Ugandan one, having ensured a peaceful re-production of elites far beyond Nyerere. In contrast, splits between and amongst elites of ethnic groups in Uganda have led stability in Uganda to be associated with Museveni as a person: the author claims that, in the event Museveni disappears or is weakened, Uganda may be prone to experience further intra-state conflict; first within western elites (Bahima vs non-Bahima), but also between western Banyankole elites and those of the main ethnic group, the Baganda. While the former may lead to, for example, a coup d’état, there is less chance for larger-scale violence between the Banyankole and Baganda due to mutual business interests benefitting from a division of tasks between the Baganda with their economic wealth and numeric advantage as well as the coercive power of the Banyankole. However, the author accurately predicts a more aggressive state repression associated with failing state building and a decline of productive sectors especially in Buganda and Western Uganda. With the discovery of oil, the regime would employ more of its coercive capacity and pay less attention to its human rights record (p.196-197). This is consistent with current affairs in Uganda.

As to policy recommendations, the author argues that aid reduces indigenous ability to negotiate for collective goods: in Uganda, while donors have become more and more critical of the regime, Ugandans nonetheless may feel that peace and democracy have not been achieved because of donor’s inaction to press for concrete reforms. Because of the impossibility of lasting state-building from the outside, development aid actors are presented with an irresolvable dilemma: they may either continue supporting a regime that has failed to deliver or they opt for an opposition that has not, however, offered credible alternatives to Museveni – in both cases carrying the danger of aid “crowding out” domestic state-building efforts. As to different targets of aid, the author argues that broad based development should be given priority over democratization (p.201-202). In Tanzania, where power structures and institutions have remained largely intact, donor support tends to help

consolidate elites in power. These implications are also true for Zanzibar (p.214).

Finally, the author views large scale violence in both Tanzania and Uganda as unlikely in the foreseeable future because in both countries, states have consolidated their power over the last fifty years (violently in Uganda and more peacefully in Tanzania). This is not quite as true for Zanzibar, where due to the strong involvement of the mainland the process of state-building and elite consolidation has not really taken place yet. This leads to a potential danger of larger-scale violence, should the mainland one day retreat voluntarily or be forced out by domestic pressure, without a new elite taking over (p.215).

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Leonardo R. Arriola, *Multiethnic Coalitions in Africa: Business Financing of Opposition Election Campaigns*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, 324 pp, 9781107605435.

In a survey of 74 African elections won by incumbents or their designated successors between 1985 and 2005, Leonardo Arriola estimates that a full 40 percent of these would have produced different results had opposition parties formed coalitions across ethnic lines (p. 7). In nine of these, official results themselves confirmed incumbent tallies below 50 percent. That multi-ethnic opposition coalitions are a key factor in unseating entrenched governments in Africa is widely accepted and backed up by even a cursory look at recent elections. This fact serves as the premise for *Multiethnic Coalitions in Africa*, which problematises the ‘how’ and ‘when’ these coalitions come into fruition and the obstacles that incumbents use to block them.

The conclusion put forward is a “theory of pecuniary coalition building,” that revolves around coalition *formateur*’s access to financing (p. 19). Coalitions form, that is, when they have access to sufficient capital to secure the endorsements from potential rival opposition elites who can then be co-opted into a partnership. Rather than just being one among many factors, Arriola claims that the pecuniary dimension is supreme above “electoral rules, the intensity of ethnic competition, or the intervention of civil society” (p. 178) in the formation of coalitions, and thus the likelihood of a democratic transfer of power. Hence, the study is predicated on a strictly materialist reading of African

patrimonial politics that assumes all elite loyalty is there to be ‘purchased’ in a rational-actor structure. While this rings true in the vast majority of cases, some attention in the theory to the more personal factors of coalition building – personal and family rivalry is a surprisingly common example – would have given it another dimension.

Given that opposition politicians often lack sufficient personal wealth to finance such elite recruitment, and the mere promise of later state resources while in office is problematic, Arriola’s theory has the business community filling in the gap to facilitate “upfront” payments from *formateurs* to potential partners in the formation of the coalition (p. 33). In this sense, *Multiethnic Coalitions in Africa* compliments the well-known ‘rhizome’ state model put forward by Bayart’s (1989) analysis, which utilises the same underground pecuniary conditions to theorise how the state maintains its grasp on power.

That the possibility of multi-ethnic coalitions is “directly linked to the business sector’s autonomy from state-controlled capital” (p. 19) adds a historical dimension to the book that traces the liberalisation of capital from the colonial era, beginning with the relationship between nationalist movements and their financiers. Those movements that were funded by export oriented indigenous businesses and maintained these connections in government were more inclined to allow for the development of independent banks (the number of which is used as a proxy to this economic-historical analysis). Leaders that deemed the proliferation of home-grown entrepreneurs as a threat to state patronage regimes restricted the development of private capital via a mix of financial reprisal regimes.

In another causal path, Arriola points out that the exogenous shift in donor funding regimes from the 1980s saw states reliant on cash crop exports, fiscally unable to resist the pressure for financial liberalisation in the way that oil and resources states could. Hence, those more prone to structural adjustment freed up space in the financial sector that impacts the freedom of capital today. This indirect link between successful structural adjustment and the likelihood of democratic regime change (p. 137) is likely to be the most contentious conclusion of the book.

The examples of Cameroon and Kenya, used as the primary case studies throughout the book, are especially useful in illustrating its pecuniary theory. Where Paul Biya was able to retain the obedience of the entrepreneurial elite that flirted with opposition coalitions throughout the 1990s, Kenya’s Daniel Arap Moi lost control of their Kikuyu equivalent in 2002 after successfully playing them off against

chief rival Mwai Kibaki for the previous decade. In both cases, the book argues that these entrepreneurs were naturally inclined to oppose the incumbent regime after severe economic mismanagement.

As Arriola notes, the nature of African political finance is such that open data sets on campaign contribution are hard to come by. Hence, he is forced to infer much of the funding relationship between entrepreneurs and political elites, and its flow between *formateurs* and coalition partners. However he accounts for this with impressively thorough investigation: in Kenya's case, the bold assertion that Mwai Kibaki was able to offer direct payments to his alliance partners before the election, is backed up by mysterious bankruptcy court settlements and interviews with political operatives (pp. 204-205), that were quite convincing (I was sceptical that such a thing could be proved).

The book balances both quantitative and qualitative analysis of the elite bargaining process well. However it would be well complimented by a qualitative angle from the ground up, addressing the public narratives around the partnering of individual elites and their ethnic communities, which may not matter as much in the coalition building process as in their cross-ethnic electoral success. In Kenya's 2002 election for example, why did the predominantly Kikuyu areas vote for one Kikuyu (Kibaki) over another (Uhuru Kenyatta)? But providing such a context is less the author's omission than the reader's responsibility. Overall *Multiethnic Coalitions in Africa* is cogently argued, thoroughly researched, and makes profound impact on the continuing discussion on Africa's multifarious democratisation.

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Lorenzo Cotula, *The Great African Land Grab? Agricultural Investments and the Global Food System*. London and New York: Zed Books, 2013, 248 pp, ISBN 9781780323114.

Investment in most of African countries' agriculture has not kept pace with the force of globalization evident in other economic sectors, despite liberalization measures and introduction of various incentives aimed at attracting large scale investments. This, however, seems beginning to change with the increasing international and local farmland acquisitions over the past few years – a phenomenon widely reported as 'land grabbing' but far less comprehensively accounted for.

In *The Great African Land Grab? Agricultural Investments and the Global Food System*, which forms part of the ‘African Arguments series’ – concise and engaging books that address the key issues currently facing Africa – Lorenzo Cotula aims to ‘offer an academically rigorous yet accessible reader’ (p.5) on the current debate on land grabbing in Africa. The book draws on particular insights from the experience of four African countries – Ghana, Mali, Mozambique and Tanzania – selected on the basis of historical backgrounds, legal traditions and policy orientations. Cotula structured the book into six chapters. With a succinct introduction (chapter 1), he makes a case for three major (but interrelated) arguments for understanding the phenomenon of land rush in the continent — historical (chapter 2), political economy (chapter 3), legal (chapter 4) — and assesses socio-economic implications (chapter 5) and draws conclusions with a way forward (chapter 6).

Cotula justifies the choice of the term ‘land grab’ in the title of the book as one dictated by convenience – it is ‘what many readers immediately relate to’ (p.7). He contends that ‘[m]uch of the contemporary debate about the land deals is framed in simplistic terms, pitching greedy global capitalists – the “land grabbers”- against poor “communities” in Africa’; but he tips us that he undertook the research with no *a priori* assumption ‘that the deals are necessarily bad’ but rather ‘with open mind aimed to develop rigorous analysis of the available evidence’ which reveals a rather complex picture than often assumed (p.7).

In his historical argument for the land deals in Africa, Cotula challenges the tendency of much of the recent literature on land deals framing the phenomenon in ahistorical terms; and he locates the historical roots of major land grabbing in Africa in colonial encounters. Indeed, there is little disagreement that colonization was the typical case of land grabbing in Africa and elsewhere. But particularly illuminating is Cotula’s account of how African states have emerged as ‘land grabbers’ themselves by maintaining the colonial legacies and employing similar techniques that weaken local land rights (pp. 9-11 and 24) and how local elites and urban groups have increasingly been acquiring land – at small scale but with no less cumulative impact – by manipulating legal and customary norms (pp. 27-33). As Cotula shows us, these successive ‘land grabbing’ phases have created highly stratified local groups with widely diverging interests thereby facilitating (if also complicating) the recent rush for land in Africa.

Cotula's take on the international political economy of the land deals (chapter 3), while not necessarily presenting new findings, draws our attention to the conceptual and methodological problems inherent in the land deals datasets and the geographical diversity and uneven media attention given to certain deals (investors) as opposed to others. Given the fluidity of the data sets, it indeed appears better to focus, as Cotula advises, on how the land rush is exacerbating land pressures in a given location instead of the debate on the actual size of land acquisitions in the abstract (p.49). Indeed, the mutable patterns of land deals are self-evident. For instance, just two months after the publication of this book, the size of land deals Cotula cites for Tanzania, Cameroon and Zambia from the Land Matrix dataset as of December 2012 (p.43) has already significantly reduced in the case of Tanzania and Cameroon while that of Zambia more than doubled.³¹¹ Cotula's take on the media spotlight on the Gulf States and China when American and European companies are still the dominant players in land acquisitions in Africa mainly for biofuel, which by some estimates is even outpacing food production as a major driver, is also worth noting.

Perhaps one of the notable strengths of this book, compared to the few other books directly addressing the phenomenon at hand, is its account of the role of law in the land rush, which arguably is at the heart of the land deals. Although 'land grabbing' may imply a unilateral appropriation by 'land grabber', the reality on the ground is that most of the land deals are based on contracts duly signed and comply with national laws and hence 'legal' in that sense; land grabbing is happening 'in the shadow of the law' as Cotula shows us. The complicity of both national and international norms to facilitate large scale land acquisitions in a manner that unlikely benefit local people (p.87) is thus a rather disconcerting picture of law in this process.

Despite the challenge of assessing the impact of land deals on national economies as the deals are often of long term nature, Cotula cautiously concludes that '[o]verall, evidence from different parts of Africa suggests that the negatives tend to outweigh the positives' (p. 1338-139) and that '[a]s a broad generalization, local livelihoods tend to be disrupted in ways that are not offset by the new agricultural venture.' (p.145). Cotula further reminds us that the critical fault line in the 'land grabbing' arena is not necessarily about scale, pitching small-

³¹¹ Land Matrix, Web of transnational land deals, available at <<http://www.landmatrix.org/get-the-idea/web-transnational-deals/>> accessed September 30, 2013.

versus large-scale farming. It is about control –which should have the authority to shape key decisions and processes.’(p.181) He attributes the main reason why the land rush is proving bad news for the rural people to ‘a complete failure of governance’ which in turn is rooted in historical trajectories, political economies, and legal frameworks which create a context that is not conducive to the deals producing equitable outcomes(p181-182). It could then be argued that the responsibility for this failure lies not only at the local level where the deleterious effects of such investments are ostensibly felt but also at international level – with home governments and international institutions contributing to the roots of the process but which have thus far not moved beyond voluntary guidelines.

Looking forward, Cotula suggests, among others, the need to empower rural people and re-think of national and international legal frameworks that regulate investment in the global south. He further advises to pursue different models of investment (such as contract farming) than acquiring land overseas which cannot be an effective strategy to ensure national food security as commodity price hikes could spark waves of re-negotiations or export restrictions that affect several countries at the same time(p.168). The legal implications of such re-negotiations and restriction measures in the light of international trade and investment laws, however, deserve further treatment than given in the book.

Overall, the rigour of this work makes it yet another valuable contribution to the emerging body of literature on the phenomenon of ‘land grabbing’ in Africa. It could be too early to offer a cogent assessment of the real impact of the increasing farmland deals in Africa. But if the emerging evidence is of any indication, host governments have now more than enough ground to reconsider their enchantment for such investments and be cautiously optimistic about, if not completely halt, the race.

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Rebecca Shumway. *The Fante and the Transatlantic Slave Trade*. Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2011, 246 pp, ISBN 9781580463911.

For first-time students in the history of the Fante People of Ghana, *The Fante and the Transatlantic Slave Trade* is the book to read. For those already familiar with Fante history, Rebecca Shumway presents a different approach to the study and analysis of the subject; different in the sense that, unlike other scholars, Shumway analyses Fante history in the context of the different polities along the Central Coast of Ghana and their hinterlands that subsequently morphed into present-day Fante, rather than analysing it from the usual generic Akan perspective or Asante-centric context.

The introductory chapter sets out a brief historiography of Southern Ghana, noting the conspicuous absence of a study on the “correlation between Fante political history and the Atlantic Slave Trade” (p. 10). Hence, the focus of the study is the period 1700 to 1807 during which European trade on the Gold Coast, as Ghana was then called, shifted from gold trade to slave trade. The focus on that period is also significant for the fact that the Asante conquest of Denkyira in 1701 marked the beginning of the expansionist Asante Kingdom which eventually invaded Fanteland consistently between 1807 and 1816. Both the slave trade and Asante military campaigns necessitated significant socio-economic, political and cultural changes in the polities along the central coast (pp. 21-22), including the formation of a Coastal Coalition, militarisation of the region, emergence of Anomabo as an important trading hub and the emergence of a Fante identity amongst the hitherto different tribal and linguistic groups.

Chapter one of the book traces the evolution of trade in Southern Ghana first, from ‘coasting’ trade amongst coastal populations and the north-bound trade of gold between caravan traders from Western Sudan and the forest hinterlands to the advent of European gold trade in the fifteenth century; and secondly, the transformation from European gold trade to Transatlantic slave trade. In examining the economic, cultural and political developments of the diverse populations of the Central Coast during the seventeenth century, the chapter presents the background for analysing the significant changes that took place in the region with the expansion of the slave trade in the eighteenth century. The reader is introduced to the polities of Komenda, Eguafu, Fetu, Asebu, Abrem, Wassa, Etsi, Agona and, importantly, the Akans and

Borbor Fantes, all of which form part of today's Fante. We also meet the Portuguese, English, Dutch, Danes, Swedes and Brandenburg all engaged in gold trade and preserving the Gold Coast solely for gold in contrast to the coasts of modern-day Togo, Benin, Nigeria and Angola – the Slave Coast (p. 34).

Having already laid down the necessary groundwork for analysing eighteenth century Fanteland in the previous chapter, the author explores the characteristics of the expansion of the slave trade in chapter two. In the context of the expanding slave trade, Shumway also examines the impact of the numerous forts and castles dotting the coastal line and the fierce rivalry between English and Dutch traders for dominance. The chapter also considers the emergence of Anomabo as a principal slave market given that the town resisted any form of European monopoly on trade on its shores unlike Cape Coast and Elmina where the English and Dutch created their respective spheres of dominance. The chapter makes for a very fascinating and compelling reading for a number of reasons, one of which is the provision of figures and percentages of enslaved people and their destinations (pp. 55-56). Another is the proliferation of a practice known as *panyarring*, a form of pawnship involving the seizure of goods or people where failure to settle a debt could easily result in forfeiture of seized goods or the sale into slavery of people seized on account of a debt or dispute. Another practice was to initiate a *palaver* (dispute) by either *panyarring* goods belonging to, or people related to a person who has aggrieved another or by some other method guaranteed to yield a response. A notable example of the use of a *palaver* (not discussed in the book) was when Eno Baisie Kurentsi (John Currantee) organised one against the English trading company to secure the release of his son, William Ansa Sassrako (on the cover of the book), who had been sold into slavery in Barbados by a treacherous ship captain instead of being sent to Europe to be educated. By opting to sell slaves not only to the merchants at the forts and castles but mainly to slaving ships and pirates, Anomabo effectively established a thriving 'boat trade' as against 'fort trade' and gave the town's leaders and traders great leverage against European merchants.

In chapter three, Shumway explores the political response of the coastal polities to the expanding slave trade and emergence of the Asante Kingdom in the eighteenth century. The need to protect their people and polities meant that the various coastal polities had to forge an alliance with their neighbours (a Coastal Coalition) in the form of a decentralised government. Each town or village had an *Asafo* company

(militia group) ready for easy mobilisation when needed for defence against Asante or slavers trying to kidnap people into slavery; a new group of politico-military leaders arises; the Coastal Coalition forms military and diplomatic alliances with the polities of Twifo, Wassa and Akyem to the north in order to curtail Asante expansion to the coast and maintain the Fantes' role as intermediaries between Asante and Europeans on the Central Coast.

Finally, chapter four highlights the role of the Borbor Fante deity at *Nananom Mpow* and the establishment of commoner militia groups (*Asafo* companies) as two important institutions central to the development of Fante culture. A new distinctive language - Fante, "which blended Akan, Guan and Etsi dialects and, also incorporated words and phrases from Portuguese, English and Dutch" became the lingua franca "across the territory administered by the Coastal Coalition" (pp. 133; 152).

The Fante and the Transatlantic Slave Trade challenges the "pervasive misconception among many historians that the Asante Kingdom controlled the entire territory of the Gold Coast throughout the era of the slave trade" and highlights the autonomy of the central coast as the defining feature of the history of Southern Ghana during the slave trade. The book also bridges a gap in the historiography of coastal Ghana given that most studies tend to either focus on the era of the gold trade or the post-1807 period "when Britain established colonial rule over the region" (p. 10).

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Dane Kennedy. *The Last Blank Spaces: Exploring Africa and Australia*. Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2013, 353pp, ISBN 9780674048478.

It is a rare book that is scholarly, well-written, and accessible – while being enlightening and often fascinating. This is one such and Dane Kennedy should be congratulated. There is a revival of interest in travel writing. Academics such as Tim Fulford have sought to advance a critically theoretic view of how travellers, particularly from the Victorian era, viewed the strange new worlds they encountered. They did not always have condescending views. Mungo Park's account of Africa was often sympathetic, and the 'penny-dreadfuls' (cheap stall-sold books churned out in Victorian Britain) regaled their readers with

noble savages from the South Pacific. To a large and lingering extent, even the sympathetic views were ‘orientalised’ – made to fit into metropolitan categories and used for metropolitan purposes. What Dane Kennedy has done, however, is to look at the writing of white explorers *as they travelled*, i.e. at their diaries, journals and letters – so that we have accounts of encounters that are less mediated by the requirements of the metropole and more attuned to the exigencies of the unknown and the need for survival; and, in this need for survival, certain forms of dependency upon native guides and informants – some of whom became what can be properly described as friends.

Kennedy of course argues that the explorations did indeed allow the ‘orientalisation’ of the world and its usage by others. However, he also argues very well that the territories being explored represented the limits of European knowledge. The very first chapter on mapping continents shows how, at the beginning of the 19th century, Africa was ‘named’ in its north (Egypt, Ethiopia, the ‘Barbary’ states) but the rest of the land-mass had no names apart from the colonial outstations in the Cape and Natal. By mid-century, the Ashanti Kingdom in the west had been added to maps as a named territory, as were Liberia and colonial Senegambia. The rest remained stubbornly anonymous. Yet, to be named meant also the ascription of organisation and the agency to organise society along rational lines. Some writers did refer to unknown ‘civilisations’, but ‘knowledge’ was frequently derived from travellers’ tales that could be very tall. A ‘heart of darkness’ was not long in being assumed – with or without debate on Conrad’s book. But Australia was for a long period not even completed in its outline as a continent. It was depicted in maps from the 1700s as a broken squiggle. No one knew where the squiggle went, and no indicators were given as to the possibilities of societies and cultures within something that was not itself complete. The eventual completion of knowledge meant the imposition of the metropolitan categories of knowledge as the two continents were filled in.

Having said that, I found this book especially interesting in the accounts of the relationships explorers formed with their key guides and informants – who sometimes even helped plan the expeditions. Burton and Speke spoke glowingly of Sidi Mubarak ‘Bombay’; Ernest Giles referred to ‘old Jimmy’ as a ‘philosopher and friend.’ George Grey called his guide, ‘my friend Kaiber.’ Grey and Kaiber much preferred each other’s company to that of the British soldiers in their party; as did Thomas Mitchell and his Australian aboriginal guide, John Piper, who made the ‘white fellows’ of their party appear ‘rather stupid.’

But, whatever relationships were formed, the explorers were (for the most part) destined to return home. They had sponsors to satisfy and, here another fascinating part of Dane Kennedy's book, reputations to embellish. Public lectures and manuscripts written after return had to make exploration glamorous and the explorer even more so. The past master of this was Henry Stanley - but Stanley did not act unabated. His publishers complained of a book that was too scientific, for "after all the scientific readers will be *few*." So, both by his inclination **and** with encouragement, Stanley spun himself into a legend. Not that he hadn't made himself a legend in Africa itself. His local name, translated as 'the breaker of rocks,' alluded to his habit of dynamiting his way through river obstacles. So, let us say Stanley was not a man given to subtleties.

Female travellers and explorers arrived just as the boundary between travelling and exploration began to fade. May French Sheldon and Mary Kingsley had a huge impact on views of Africa, as did Marianne North's paintings of the outback of Australia. But what united everyone by this time was the depiction of something, if no longer fully exotic, picturesque. In this way, the continents were tamed in the public imagination; and the glamour of the explorers shoved into the background their many failures and trepidations and desperations. From the foreground of tamed exotica, the picturesque, glamour and imagination comes a certain contemporary nostalgia for an unspoiled Africa and Australia – with the implication that those who followed the explorers were the spoilers. Dane Kennedy gives human will and effort their due, accords the explorers their humanity, but shows how metropolitan outreach and conquest, followed by latter-day metropolitan nostalgia, are imperial. The terrains and societies they encountered were complex and difficult – not pure and pastoral, not arcadian. But, for the sheer complexity the explorers faced, and how they faced them, in looking at their immediacies, Dane Kennedy shows an astute soft spot.

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