

# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Bak Rasmussen, Ane Marie. *A History of the Quaker Movement in Africa*. London and New York: British Academic Press, 1994. xvii & 168 pp. \$75.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-85043-904-2.

Reviewed by John Plank (Professor Emeritus, University of Connecticut)  
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This book is a short, solid, sensible, straight forward account that will give most readers all they need or want to know about Quakerism in Africa. Its title is a bit misleading, since the monograph deals almost exclusively with Quakerism in Western Kenya where Quaker faith and practice differ significantly from those, for instance, among the white population in the Republic of South Africa. The matter, however, is really of small importance because, of Africa's 175,000 Quakers, 150,000 reside in Western Kenya.

Much more to be regretted is Bak Rasmussen's sudden and unexpected death in 1992, before she completed the thorough comparative study she had intended to write. Although others—notably her husband, Joseph Wasiki Mululu; Harold V. Smuck, for years a Quaker missionary in Kenya; and Kathleen Staudt, a political scientist who was closely familiar with Bak Rasmussen's work—have reviewed the manuscript and have added elucidative material, the book seems unfinished and unrounded. There are too many avenues left unexplored, too many questions left unanswered. Other investigators will surely pick up on these, of course, and will find this book immensely helpful in their researches.

Ane Marie Bak Rasmussen, a Dane with developed interests in both Africa and theology, undertook her study of Quakerism in Kenya as part of a broader inquiry into the relationship between Kenyan Quaker history and that of the Holy Spirit Churches. The latter are revivalist Christian groups that, as the Quakers, depend upon an awareness of the indwelling divine presence, or Light, in all persons, but diverge from Quakerism in emphases upon conversion, public confession of sins, speaking in tongues, and belief in coming of Christ.

Had Bak Rasmussen survived, it is probable that she

would have proceeded to do a comprehensive study in comparative religion. She presumably would have contrasted the Quakers' emphases upon faith and social praxis with the Holy Spirit Churches's stress on faith and individual redemption and salvation via the mediation of charismatic leaders. Instead, we have here basically a chronological and descriptive recounting of Quaker institutional organizations and activities in Kenya since the arrival of the first three American Quaker missionaries in 1902. (They were, by the way, the first Christian missionaries in Western Kenya, having followed the newly built railway from Mombasa to Kisumu and Kakamega.)

Quakers in Kenya, whether foreign missionaries as they first were, or altogether Kenyan in nationality and culture as they are today, have always stressed not only individual spiritual development but also service to others. From the beginning, therefore, Quakers have played major, even preponderant, roles in secondary education, in vocational and agricultural training, and in health and medicine, at least in Western Kenya.

What is chiefly lacking in Bak Rasmussen's present book is an adequate examination of how the Quakers, through their non-evangelical activities, fit into the surrounding political, economic, social and cultural environment of Kenya. Kenyans who received their formal education in Quaker secondary schools, for example, early emerged as a small, westernized elite, and they acquired substantial economic and social power. This elite perforce had to work with established Kenyan authorities, whether those of the British colony or those of the post-independence period. Particularly intriguing is the question of how Quaker institutions have fared under the government of Daniel arap Moi.

Unfortunately, in the testament left by Bak Ras-

mussen such subjects are scarcely addressed. More generally, while the book provides information, it lacks any real organizing principle, any conceptual or theoretical coherence. To be sure, the information is abundant, and it has been carefully collected from interviews, archives and other sources both inside and outside Kenya. But it is not, and, with the materials it brings together, it cannot

be a finished and fully satisfying work of scholarship.

One final note: the book's first chapter, a brief history of Quakerism from its seventeenth century English origins through its American transformations and schisms during the nineteenth century to the midwestern missionary outthrusting of the early twentieth century—this chapter is simply superb.

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