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Allen Issacman, Richard Roberts, eds. *Cotton, Colonialism and Social History in Sub-Saharan Africa.* Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1995. xi + 314 pp. $26.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-435-08968-9; $60.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-435-08966-5.

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Much as the collection of essays in Palmer and Parsons' *The Roots of Rural Poverty in Southern Africa* did some twenty years ago, *Cotton, Colonialism, and Social History* is certain to reshape the interpretation of the history of cash crop agriculture. This new volume is the product of a 1992 Minnesota-Stanford conference on the social history of cotton in colonial Africa, and it comprises a stimulating mix of recently conducted case study research. Its geographic coverage is quite representative, with case studies drawn from all the major cotton-producing regions of sub-Saharan Africa. And much more than the *Roots of Rural Poverty*, the contributed chapters in *Cotton, Colonialism, and Social History* cover a broad range of sub-topics, from metropolitan interests, colonial agricultural and marketing policies, and state coercion to indigenous parallel markets and peasant decision-making.

Most important, however, the analyses offered by the various contributors are often quite fresh and noteworthy. In particular, a number reject simplistic coercion/market stimuli and collaboration/ resistance paradigms in favor of more complex politically, materially, or socially grounded interpretations of either colonial policymaking or African economic behavior, ensuring that this collection will be cited for years to come.

The first group of case studies, "cotton policies and African realities," addresses colonial attempts to promote cotton production in African rural environments, societies, and economies. Several policy chapters focus on internal, official debates, highlighting contradictions or disagreements within respective colonial regimes, while others explore policy implementation, noting that the strategies devised by African communities as well as the dynamics of African markets often thwarted or redirected official intiatives. Of particular note is Philip Porter's essay on climate and cotton, in which he argues that efforts to promote cotton in Africa were environmentally "misplaced," with relatively low yields as a result of tropical climatic conditions and not, as strongly suggested by colonial observers, capital deficiencies in African husbandry. I also admired Donna Maier's chapter, in which she examines the persistance of intercropping and parallel markets in German Togo, and in the process provides an informed critique of both the vent-for-surplus and underdevelopment paradigms.

The second group, "struggles over labor/struggles over markets," features regional or local contests over cotton production and exchange. The marketing chapters are perhaps the most uniform. All stress the resilience of parallel, indigenous markets in cotton, both in terms of the relative autonomy they provided African producers, and the contradictions these unofficial transactions posed for colonial regulators and metropolitan buyers.

The labor chapters are more eclectic, though no less interesting. Of note here are Osumaka Likaka's study of forced cotton production in the Belgian Congo, and Thaddeus Sunseri's investigation of labor competition between peasant and plantation agriculture in Tanzania's Rufiji Basin during the German era. Likaka argues for the long-term ineffectiveness of coercion, but moves beyond obvious evidence of production declines to explain the respective strategies of colonial police and cultivators. Sunseri's research found that, despite their political bluster, many German cotton planters were forced to adopt sharecropping systems and African agricultural techniques on their estates in order to attract labor from autonomy-conscious peasant communities. The underlying suggestion in both, therefore, is that African peasants were able significantly to reshape the terms of colonial agricultural labor.

The final group, "cotton, food security and reproduction of rural communities," focuses on the concerns and strategies of cultivators. Of all the chapters in this volume, these are the most impressive for their ability to

convey an understanding of cotton production and policies from a local perspective. The two strongest contributions are analyses of community decision-making: Jamie Monson speaks to the rice/cotton trade-off for cultivators in southern Tanzania; and Elias Mandala studies the maize/cotton and sorghum/cotton equation for cultivators in Malawi. Monson's essay painstakingly lays out labor schedules for various food and cash crops, then prioritizes them in terms of local community economic, social, and religious needs to conclude that, despite colonial pressure, cultivators preferred rice. Mandala provides a great deal of similar material gathered from interviews in Malawi, though cotton would appear to have made a greater impact there.

It should be noted, however, that *Cotton, Colonialism, and Social History* is not without its frustrations. Undergraduate readers may find the introduction disjointed, and there are also no summary conclusions drawn for their benefit. Those more familiar with the literature, moveover, will be disappointed that both the editors and many of the contributors repeatedly fail to make explicit connections with the broader cash crop historiography. In a final, ironic parallel with *The Roots of Rural Poverty*, many of the more important historiographic critiques or significant research findings presented within *Cotton, Colonialism, and Social History* are stated implicitly, and thus it is left to the reader to construct a more explicit framework in which to evaluate them.

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